EXPLORING WORK-STUDY STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF PERSISTENCE AT A NORTHEASTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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by
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Abstract

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis was to investigate the experience of persistence on the part of work-study students at a Northeastern community college. The construct of resilience provided the conceptual framework through which the collected data were analyzed. The broad question informing this investigation was how do work-study students understand the experiences that influence their decision to persist at a community college. Data from one-on-one interviews served as the main source of information, followed by observations made by the researcher and information from the college’s Banner Data System. Each participant’s account was analyzed individually. From the preliminary tables, a main chart was created that contained four superordinate themes with 10 nested themes. Data were validated against the participants’ transcripts and participant’s feedback. The research findings over all revealed that their persistence was influenced by the way they strengthened their resiliency as they developed the mechanisms required to cope with stress, engage in what they sensed as welcoming environments, develop personal and professional identities, and acquire time-management skills. These findings suggest that to improve campus persistence among adult populations at this particular community college, similar work opportunities should be made available to more students. Higher-education institutions, by finding alternative ways to fund on-campus work, should ensure that student jobs are paired with individuals’ areas of study and take place at culturally inclusive work locations where they can feel connected with both supervisors and peers and can experience professional growth. Future research might include a multi-community-college study with a larger sample size, other extra-curricular groups, and additional factors influencing students to drop out despite participation in work-study.

Keywords: persistence, work-study, resilience, supportive relationships, socialization
Dedication

To the Memory of My Mother, Josefina Otero Ortiz

Mom, I remember when we were not sure if I (we) would be able to afford the study for my first degree. We did not know much about how to pay for college. I told you not to worry, that with the support of financial aid I would be able to finish my bachelor’s degree. Although you passed away before I reached my goal, I know you were always on my side. I thank you for your understanding and support throughout my life, especially during my first three year of college. I saw you struggle through your illness, but despite everything, you always kept moving forward. Your example helped me learn to be a warrior, a strong individual, one who in this case aimed to achieve what seemed impossible at the time, a doctoral degree. Today, because of your strength, I have reached this high goal. I dedicate my accomplishment to your memory and wish you were here to celebrate it with me. With all my love, thank you.

To My Father, Emiliano Vélez Pedraza

Dad, I could not thank you enough for your support throughout my life. Thank you for helping me become the man I am today, for being my role model and inspiration. Your knowledge, wisdom, and understanding of life have provided guidelines for me to follow. Thank you for always asking me how I was doing in my studies. The warm support you provided was enough, just what was needed to keep me moving forward. Thank you for taking care of mom when she needed you most. After her passing, you taught me to be strong and resilient. Because of that, today I can say to you, “Muchas gracias y bendición. Te quiero mucho.”
Acknowledgments

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Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the six participants of this study who provided me with numerous hours of their valuable time. They shared with me the precious gift of their experiences. I thank them for continually supporting me as I moved through the program toward my goal.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

American community colleges are facing extreme challenges. While enrollment keeps increasing on account of the current economic situation and other factors, federal and state financial support is declining (Chen & St. John, 2011), thereby forcing students to work to pay for their education (Riggert, Boyle, Petrosko, Ash & Rude-Parkins, 2006). As a result, the persistence of these student workers has become an important issue.

The topic of persistence is quite broad and complex, especially when one is considering two-and four-year institutions. Despite significant research into students persistence, very few studies have focused on two-year institutions (Torres, 2006), above all with regard to the work-study student population. In fact, the majority of the research has been conducted on the “traditional-age[d], full-time, four-year residential undergraduate population,” where results are not necessarily applicable to adult students in community colleges (Cox & Ebber, 2010, p. 339). The studies of Tinto (1975, 1993) and John Bean and Barbara Metzner (1985), for example, were focused on traditional students at four-year colleges.

The problem is that the community-college student population has different characteristics from those of four-year college students (Cox & Ebber, 2010; Fike & Fike, 2008). Actually, a significant proportion of community-college students come from low-income families (Fike & Fike, 2008) and thus need to work while in school to help pay for tuition (Bozick, 2007). In the state of Connecticut, community-college students work on and off campus. They are assigned to both federal and state work-study programs. The federal program, for example, requires that seven percent of the total number of students be assigned to jobs at community-service locations. While work-study students work on and off campus, they all
experience mentor/mentee relationships with their supervisors as well as peer support, both of which could be factors that influence their decisions to stay in school (Barbatis, 2010). Currently, empirical research suggests the need for additional studies at the community-colleges level (Cox & Ebber, 2010; Fike & Fike, 2008; Forbus, Mehta & Newbold, 2010; Settle, 2010). A detailed description has been provided of the sample and location of the current study. It is appropriate to mention, though, that this study has focused on campus versus off-campus workers. Finally, the researcher conducted a qualitative empirical study to demonstrate which experiences work-study students (both federal-and state-fund) have in common that influence their decision to persist in community college.

**Significance**

Recent findings indicate that being a financial-aid recipient increases a student’s chances to persist in college (Crisp & Nora, 2008; Hillman, 2010; Settle, 2010). To date, research on financial aid, both work-study programs (Fike & Fike, 2008) and student loans (Hillman, 2010), has been targeted to their economic impact. In fact, quantitative studies have predominated, while qualitative research into such factors as staff and faculty interactions with student workers has been sparse (Crisp & Nora, 2008; Kulm & Cramer, 2006; Lundberg, 2004; Settle, 2011). Riggert et al. (2006), moreover, have shown the complexity and contradictions that exist in empirical literature regarding work and students’ persistence.

Hillman (2010) noted that the research to date has given little attention to the work-study program but has focused instead on financial-aid grants and student loans. Researchers’ interests have been varied. While some have stressed the need to study the indirect influences on students’ academic and social integration (Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey & Jenkins, 2007), others have stated that little is known about the student characteristics, college environments, and the students’
experiences at work that might contribute to persistence (Riggert et al., 2006). These studies highlight the need to create processes and strategies that promote student persistence. At the same time, current state and institutional financial-aid policies that address work-study funding require change (Settle, 2010). In fact, with the rising cost of higher education, increasing the allocation of work-study funds at federal and state levels appears to be a logical shift in policy. Goldrick-Rab (2009) stated that accountability measures have become increased significantly in community colleges. In short, there is a need to conduct further research to tease out the factors influencing students’ persistence at community college, including those related to concurrent work.

The sparse literature that does exist on community-college persistence was conducted more than two decades ago (Torres, 2006). As demographics, technology, and education have changed, findings from two decades ago may no longer be relevant (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Additionally, the needs of the local communities might have also changed. The majority of earlier research, as suggested above, was limited to examining the role of the work-study program in making a college education financially feasible (Crisp & Nora, 2008; Fike & Fike, 2008; Settle, 2010) rather than considering its influence on students persistence. According to Strauss and Volkwein (2004), when community colleges can predict and maximize their students’ persistence, the institutions increase their capacity to plan as well as their revenues. Thus there is value in additional qualitative studies that addresses the relationship between student aid and persistence.

**The Audience**

Today, institutions of higher education are trying to understand how to maximize positive factors that increase student persistence. In this context, Scott-Clayton (2011) reported that two-
year colleges received a disproportionately lower amount of federal work-study funds over against four-year institutions. It is therefore important for policymakers to understand what influence if any the work-study program has on students’ decisions to persist. The results of such studies if positive could help increase work-study funding so that it could be offered to more students. The findings of this study may thus stimulate the federal government and states to expand their work-study programs.

In addition, the results of this study at the institutional level could incentivize community-college administrations to allocate additional funds (federal, state, or institutional) to their work-study programs. At the student level, positive outcomes of this study could suggest that work-study funding be used to increase student engagement in their studies and persistence. In summary, the value of this study is that it will inform policy makers, federal and state agencies, and financial-aid administrators concerning the impact of work-study on community-college student persistence.

**Research Question**

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how work-study students make sense of their lived experiences of persisting at a community college in the U.S. Northeast. Hence, the broad question for this study was:

1. How do work-study students understand the experiences that influence their decision to persist at a community college?

One of the practical goals of the study was to expand the sparse literature that exists about work-study students’ persistence at community colleges. Additionally, a goal was to update previous research that in many instances has been conducted over two decades ago, and limited to four-year residential institutions. It is of great importance to understand current student
workers’ experiences that could lead to persistence because, as noted earlier, findings could generate policy assessments and changes toward expanding work-study programs, with institutional funds reallocated to benefit more participants. Additionally, this research investigates whether students who started in the work-study program persisted through graduation. Despite significant research on persistence, little is known about the experiences of work-study students that positively or negatively influence their persistence (Hillman, 2010; Riggert et al., 2006). Therefore, this study examines how students describe and make sense of their work experiences as a means to uncovering how these experiences might influence their decision to stay in college.

**Organization Statement**

The first part of this doctoral thesis provided a brief statement of the problem and presented the research question. Section number two presents the reader with the concept of *resiliency*, which will be the main concept informing this study. The topic is broad; hence, the researcher referred to a number of ways that resiliency might aid in the understanding of community-college students’ lived experiences. Scholars who will help illuminate the concept include Masten and Coatsworth (1998), Bonanno (2005), Chaskin (2008), and Bowen and Martin (2011), to mention just some of them.

Section Three of this study, then, presents a synthesis of the relevant literature about academic persistence, with an emphasis on empirical research conducted at the community-college level. Some of the most frequently cited works include Tinto, (1975, 1993), Bean and Metzner (1985), Astin (1993), as well as such more recent scholars as Riggert et al. (2006), Fike and Fike (2008), Crisp and Nora (2010), and Hillman (2010). The literature was analyzed and divided into sub-themes for review. First, a discussion of the characteristics of students attending
community colleges was presented. The aim was to introduce the reader to the specific traits of the population that will be studied. Second, this review included literature about financial aid and work-study programs. The purpose was to understand work-study as it relates to financial aid, both federal and state funded. Third, a broad definition of persistence was presented as well as early scholarly work on the subject. Fourth, the research cites studies of financial aid, students’ income levels, and their persistence. The objective was to uncover any previous research results on this topic. This three-way relationship is especially important because low income is a main characteristic of students attending community colleges. Fifth, empirical research that relates work-study to its role in college integration was examined. Note that the literature on student persistence and college integration tends to focus primarily on social versus academic integration.

The rest of the study is organized according to the established empirical-research protocols. A theoretical framework is discussed followed by the body of the literature. A broad description of the research design is presented in which the research questions and the methodology utilized for this study are described. A separate section is dedicated to discussing ethical considerations and the protection of human subjects. The last part of this study provides conclusions, references, and appendices.

**Theoretical Framework**

According to Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009), the rationale for using frameworks is to ground a study in the existing literature and document the importance of and need for the topic under study. Research without a framework lacks a basis in history and important ideas which causes a study to be shallow and drift. Butin (2010) noted that the world is not a single or fixed place because it is always seen through an individual’s culture and historical perspectives.
Consequently, having a guiding framework is all-important. Anfara and Mertz (2006) moreover defined a theoretical framework as any empirical or quasi-empirical theory that can be utilized to discover the meaning of phenomena.

This study utilized the construct of resiliency as its guiding framework. This choice proves a good fit since in analyzing student responses, the researcher can focus on the individual protective factors that have influenced their persistence. Some of these factors are the student’s economic status, his/her need to work, the opportunity work can offer them to build new personal relationships and to network, and the ability to earn funds to pay rising college tuition and fees.

Scholars have offered various understandings of the origins of resilience research. Noris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, and Pfefferbaum (2007) found that it began in the fields of mathematics and physics. They found the scientific definition of the term to be the extent to which materials and systems return to equilibrium after an original displacement. On the other hand, Theron and Theron (2010) suggested that while researching children with behavioral problems in 1980s, a group of North American researchers discovered that some of them would begin to adapt. This finding, they argued, suggested the importance of new research into the resistance-related factors, i.e., resiliency that helped the successful children deal with stress.

Despite disagreements over the origin of resilience research, current scholars have found no significant differences in defining the term. Meanwhile, the study of resilience has been growing rapidly. In a review of the various definitions of resilience, Herman, Stewart, Diaz-Granados, Berger, Jackson, and Yuen (2011) confirmed that the core meaning of the term is the “positive adaptation or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity” (p. 258). Masten (1994) stated that most of resiliency research has studied how
successful adaptation when facing risk and adversity takes place. Holling (1973) posited that “resilience determines the persistence of relationships within a system and is a measure of the ability of these systems to absorb changes of state variables, driving variables, and parameters, and still persist” (p. 17). Similarly, Plough, Fielding, Chandra, Williams, Eisenman, Wells, Law, Fogleman, and Magaña (2013) suggested that a supportive social context in a community prior to an adversity is a key component of resiliency at the individual and community levels. They also defined individual resilience as a group of protective factors that enables one to adapt when facing adversity.

For purposes of this study, the researcher utilized the definition provided by Herman et al. (2011), “positive adaptation or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity” (p. 258). This definition reflects the meaning that has prevailed historically. Therefore, this definition constitutes the main lens for the study although ideas from other frameworks and concepts that are a good fit for the investigation were drawn upon as well.

The chart below summarizes the author(s), their resiliency frameworks, constructs and general concepts used in this study. These understandings are described in detail by presenting the reader with the scholars’ most important findings. Rather than following alphabetical order, the researcher has decided to describe the constructs in order of their relevance to this particular study.

Chart 1. Resilience Construct

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar(s)</th>
<th>Resilience Construct</th>
<th>General Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chaskin (2008)</td>
<td>Framework of Community</td>
<td>Individuals utilize personal, social, and environmental resources to adapt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community is central to their identity, sense of belonging,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Theory/Model</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen and Martin (2011)</td>
<td>Resiliency and Community Action and Change</td>
<td>Model of Role Performance. Road-of-life metaphor focused on normative life experiences, informal relationships, positive challenges, human-made adversities, and five dimensions of individual assets that provide strength in traveling the road of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonanno (2005)</td>
<td>Psychological Model of Traumatic Events</td>
<td>Capacity of individuals to function normally with an enduring capacity for positive emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masten and Coatsworth (1998)</td>
<td>Psychological Framework</td>
<td>Early development of people; focused on roles of relationships, self-regulation, social competence, and control of behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other scholars’ findings:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgrave et al. (2000)</td>
<td>Supportive Feelings about Oneself, One’s Culture, and One’s Ethnic Group</td>
<td>Increased resiliency resulting in positive behavior.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, the chart above provides a holistic view of resiliency. Initially, resiliency was researched based on individual factors, personality traits, and biological factors (e.g., good health). Later, the focus shifted toward resiliency as a process which included both individual protective factors (families, parents, and extended-family support) and such community
protective factors as mentoring adults, opportunities for extracurricular activities with peers, and access to good schools (Theron & Theron, 2010). Most recently, researchers have started to study resiliency as a transactional process. That is, research was focused on ecosystem transactions, e.g., the adaptation of young people by negotiating support from the community and families while at the same time acting reciprocally toward the community (Theron & Theron, 2010). Additionally, other scholars focused their community-resiliency research at the organizational rather than the individual level (Mellow & Talmadge, 2005). Under this approach, a resilient organization is characterized by its capacity to respond and adapt to the always-changing external environment (Mellow & Talmadge, 2005).

This study utilized a holistic approach rather than ecological system theory or organizational resiliency. Ethnographic research provides a better fit for this type of cognitive cultural-ecological investigation. The researcher also considered utilizing the Individual Identity Development framework. According to Erikson (1963), this framework defines identity as a continuity-and-sameness process whereby adolescents act in consistent ways. This framework emphasizes cognitive adolescence identity development. The aim of the present study is a psychosocial view of an adult student population, thus, the researcher did not fully utilize this approach because it could limit the scope of the study. However, because development is an important dynamic in adult as well as adolescent learners, the work of Masten and Coatsworth (1998) on resiliency and the early development of people, allow the resiliency framework to be applied broadly, including to the experiences of adult learners. Hence, Erikson’s work was utilized to supplement Masten and Coatsworth’s seminal work.

The graphic below presents the construct of resilience in a framework. The students are placed at the center. The higher the combination of life factors, individual protective factors, and
community protective factors a student exhibit, the more likely for that student to persist exist. Students whose protective factors are not as strong as those persisting could stop attending for one semester to later re-enroll and perhaps graduate. These are the stopout students and cannot be considered as being persisting (Bean, 2003). Similarly, attrition students are those who interrupt enrollment for more than two consecutive semesters and exhibit a weaker combination of life factors and protective factors (Bean, 2003). Therefore, some attrition students would never return to college and stay in a circular loop; while other students could strengthen their protective factors, return, and graduate in the future. For a deeper understanding of the construct of resilience, immediately after the graphic below, each scholar’s work is presented.
The work of Chaskin, for example, has been centered on community and resilience. Chaskin (2008) defined resilience as the degree to which individuals are able to have a positive, adaptive response to adversity. He argued that such a response is influenced by not one, but many, variables. Chaskin (2008) developed the resiliency framework in terms of community. This model explores the conditions of individual lives, family, growth and development that have influenced the well-being of the person in question. That is, a resilient individual “draws on personal, social, or environmental resources to adapt successfully” and moderate negative consequences (Chaskin, 2008, p. 66). Chaskin focused on community as, first, an affective unit of belonging and identity and, second, as a functional unit where connections are temporal and “tied to a function, use or investment” (p. 67). Chaskin also viewed community as a network of relationships among individuals known to each other or as an instrument used to get access to information, opportunities, and resources extending beyond an individual’s own networks (Chaskin, 2008).

Therefore, a resilient individual is someone who exhibits positive preventive strategies in facing adversity. In addition, when an individual is resilient, it helps with recovering from traumatic life events (Chaskin, 2008). By the same token, a resilient community can promote resiliency through the social capital of its members. Through local institutions, the community can respond to threats that have collective implications (Chaskin, 2008). Similarly, other scholars have found that a supportive social context in a community prior to an adversity is a key component of resiliency at both the individual and community levels (Plough, Fielding, Chandra, Williams, Eisenman, Wells, Law, Fogleman & Magaña, 2013). These researchers also found individual resilience to consist of a group of protective factors enabling the process of adaptation to take place when one is facing adversity.
Bowen and Martin (2011) also based their work on resiliency and community. For instance, they developed the Resiliency Model of Role Performance, which focused on the ability of service members and their families to cope with both the positive and negative challenges they encountered through their lives. The authors used “a road of life” metaphor including normative life experiences like military relocations, positive challenges like assuming new responsibilities or receiving a promotion, and lastly, human-made adversities like war deployment, combat, and injuries (Bowen & Martin, 2011, p 166). Through the theory of community action and change, Bowen and Martin (2011) focused on what they called the guardrails on the edge of the road; that is, the formal and informal social connections that provided support.

According to Bowen and Martin (2011), these guardrails emerge from relationships: with spouses, extended-family members, friends, work colleagues, neighbors, and others in one’s social network. In fact, these researchers found that for the service person, unit leaders and local civilian employers provided the necessary social connections that helped them maintain a family-life balance and obtain access to information and resources provided by these support groups. This finding is consistent with a study conducted by Thompson and Kelly-Vance (2001), in which they reported that at-risk youth were positively impacted by having the support of a mentor. In fact, their study found that at-risk youth, by developing friendships with academic volunteers who assisted them with their assignments, were benefiting not just academically but were gaining resiliency as well. In a similar study, Huisman, Robb Singer, and Catapano (2010) identified mentor relationships as a key factor for developing resiliency in novice teachers confronting work challenges. As a result, novice teachers started building a supportive community within the school as a mechanism to cope with adversity (Huisman et al., 2010).
Benard (1995) for his part had earlier found that a protective factor like a supportive adult relationship fostered children’s resiliency.

Furthermore, Bowen and Martin (2011) described five sets of individual assets that provide strength in negotiating the road of life: (a) maintaining physical health; (b) having psychological health; (c) staying on track mentally despite life challenges and negative experiences; (d) having the capacity to turn to others for support; and (e) “drawing strengths from these principles or spiritual beliefs when faced with life challenges” (p. 172). Perhaps it was these strengths along the road of life that helped students in a study conducted by Clauss-Ehlers and Wibrowski (2007). They found that despite poor advice in high school and negative life experiences, the “students [in their sample] continued to express a desire for [a summer-institute] counselor to work with them academically and help them succeed” (p. 582). A similar study found that positive feelings about oneself, one’s culture, and one’s ethnic group increased resiliency resulting in positive behavior (Belgrave, Chase-Vaughn, Gray, Dixon Addison, & Cherry, 2000). This study also found that ethnically specific, culturally congruent interventions with African American females could have positive benefits.

Wilks and Spivey (2010) provided a definition of resiliency based on the degree to which individuals adapted to stressing factors and were expected to continue to resist future stress. They found that social support from friends was a positive mediating factor for resiliency in a group of social-work students confronting negative academic stress. Hence, as documented in the studies of Zaleski, Levey-Thors, and Schiaffino (1998), Sek (1991), and Wilks and Spivey (2010), it was clearly shown that support from friends is a valuable resource to enhance the resiliency of students under academic stress. In their study Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) found that academic support promoted resilience among Mexican American students. Along these
lines, Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton (2009) and Orthner and Rose (2009) found that formal and informal networks of social support had preventive and therapeutic effects which facilitated the social-adaptation process for service members and their families. Finally, Block and Block (1980) made reference to a variety of factors that can lead to resiliency. Included were situational factors like supportive relationships and individual factors like the capacity of an individual to adapt to adversity.

Bonanno (2005) defined resiliency as the capacity of individuals to function normally in all situations by having an enduring capacity for positive emotions. He presented a psychological model of traumatic events in adults and resiliency. In his framework, Bonanno (2005) described how adults show resiliency in moving from the death of a family member or close friend or being victims of violent acts toward positive resolution of the experience. Moreover, Bonanno (2005) suggested that despite mild, short-lived disruptions and adversity, resilient adults develop a healthy trajectory that allows them “manage to keep functioning effectively at or near their normal levels” (p. 136). This lens became very important in analyzing student-workers’ data because, as documented by the literature, community-college students are challenged by not having entered college with the same level of cultural and social capital as other, more socially privileged students (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Moreover, significant numbers of community-college students live in poverty (Duncan, 1999).

Masten and Coatsworth (1998) suggested that individuals gain competence to deal with challenges to adaptation and development. These researchers also argued that individuals develop the ability to comply with daily endeavors like paying bills, maintaining good health, managing their children’s schooling, and buying groceries. Bowen and Martin (2011) asserted that individuals develop the ability to fulfill their job responsibilities despite life challenges.
Masten and Coatsworth’s (1998) psychological framework was based on the early-childhood development of people. These researchers focused on relationships from infancy through adulthood that helped individuals gain the ability to regulate themselves. Reisser (1995) described how students’ relationships are part of the learning process as they help develop communication skills, self-esteem, and a set of personal values.

According to Masten and Coatsworth (1998), self-regulation enables control of behavior (attention and emotions). For students, being in control of social behavior is fundamental to being a resilient individual and a successful member of society (Mastern & Coatsworth, 1998). Moreover, self-regulation includes social competence, which has been associated with fewer stress reactions and a significant increase in self-control (Eisenberg et al., 1997) and self-control enables individuals to express concern for others. If self-control is not developed during childhood, it could hinder the individual’s social functioning later on (Mastern & Coatsworth, 1998). Hence, social competence and self-control characteristics are important factors in analyzing individual relationships. A significant justification for using these concepts in this study is that Mastern and Coatsworth (1998) followed a group of individuals from infancy through adulthood while noting the relationships these participants developed. Thus the use of the construct of resiliency as defined and analyzed in the studies just described becomes an appropriate and important analytical strategy. Therefore, this research was informed by resiliency lenses which helped to explore how individual life factors, personality traits, biological factors, personal protective factors, and community protective factors influence the work-study students’ decision to persist. These protective factors also include community resources like school or, in this case, the community college. It has been found that schools triggered resiliency
among youth when they provide a safe environment where these students feel secure (Barbarain, Richter, & De Wet, 2000).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The following analysis examined the literature in terms of students’ involvement in work-study programs and their persistence. Owing to the significant difference that exists between community-college and four-year university students, this analysis focused on synthesizing the body of literature related to non-traditional students at community colleges. For this particular study, it is important to understand what specific characteristics community-college students’ exhibit. A detailed analysis of these characteristics is presented in this chapter. In addition, this review presents a scholarly description of the work-study program at the federal and state levels, especially in the State of Connecticut.

This research, descriptive in nature, explored the literature on the topic of the persistence of work-study students attending community colleges. Considering that persistence is a broad subject and has been studied in multiple educational settings, it is important to narrow the focus to work-study (Davidson, Beck & Milligan, 2009). Through the review of the literature, the researcher developed a conceptual map of what is known about the topic and identified the gaps in research (so-called gap-spotting) (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). The purpose was to provide the reader with additional information that leads to a better understanding of the following literature-review questions: (a) What are the general characteristics of a community-college student? (b) How financial aid and work-study programs were developed? (c) What is persistence? (d) What does the literature identify as key factors relating work-study and persistence? (e) What does the literature have to say about work-study students, relationship
development, and persistence? And (f) What are the gaps in the literature regarding student persistence and work-study programs that warrant further research?

This review was organized by first providing the reader with the body of the literature followed by the researcher’s findings and summation. In the review, various themes emerged which were then grouped into subtopics under the main topic of persistence. These subtopics include early persistence studies; financial aid, income level, and persistence; college social integration and work-study; and work-study students, relationships, and socialization. The chapter ends with a summary of findings. The following section describes what scholars have found as the most important characteristics of students attending community colleges. The topic of work-study and its relationship to student persistence is also examined later in this review.

Students’ Characteristics at Community Colleges

According to the National Center of Education, 73% of all students attending higher education share some of the descriptors for the non-traditional student (Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006). Aslanian (2001, p. 29) stated that “60% of adults” matriculate at the undergraduate level in community colleges. The literature defines non-traditional students as those over 24 years of age (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cox & Ebbers, 2010; Forbus et al., 2010); who are commuter students (Aslanian, 2001; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Silverman et al., 2009); work full time; attend college part-time; have dependents; and have not followed a straight path from high school to college (Fike & Fike, 2008; Forbus et al., 2010; Silverman et al., 2009; Sorey & Duggan, 2008); are frequently minority, first-generation, low-income students (Fike & Fike, 2008; Settle, 2010; Sorey & Duggan, 2008); and work part-time (Chickering, 2000).

Of the total U.S. community-college population, O’Brien and Engle (2005) found that one-fifth were female African American, Hispanic, or Asian students. Similarly, Phillippe and
Sullivan (2005) reported that 58% of the community-college population were women 25 years or older. Crisp and Nora (2010) found that 58% of the Hispanic postsecondary-student population attended community colleges. A decade earlier, Kojaku and Nuñez (1999) had already discovered that 47% of community-college enrollees were first-generation, low-income students. In this context it is worth mentioning that, according to Paulson and Boeke (2006), community-college students accounted for 30% of all undergraduate students in the country. Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) found that first-generation students had weaker academic outcomes because they did not enter college with the same level of cultural and social capital as other students. Moreover, Duncan’s (1999) study argued that in America, a significant percentage of the population lived in poverty; thus, education was the vehicle whereby they attempted to escape poverty and break the poverty cycle. Calcagno et al. (2007) found that adult women were more likely to graduate from community colleges, although their study confirmed previous study findings which negatively associated persistence with age. That is, older students were less likely to graduate than younger ones.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2011d), the community-college minority population included 47 percent first-generation college students, of whom 53 percent were Hispanic and 45 percent Black. In answering the first literature-review question and considering the descriptors mentioned above, community-college students could exhibit any combination of the above-mentioned characteristics. These community college student’s characteristics are important when one analyzes the individual protective factors (parents, family, and friends’ support) discussed earlier in the explanation of resilience. That is, it becomes pertinent to link the community-college work-study students’ common characteristics
with their individual protective factors to better understand how these factors influence their persistence.

Because the non-traditional student population in U.S. community colleges is increasing, empirical research has become important and needed (Aslanian, 2001). College presidents, administrators, and policy makers should be paying close attention, especially to the reasons that make this population enroll in community colleges and then persist or drop out. If these officials had a better understanding of why non-traditional students dropped out, they would be able to develop more effective intervention processes and programs (Calcagno et al., 2007). For instance, Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth (2004) recommended that community colleges establish programs that enhance the social and intellectual opportunities for students, especially minority students. Similarly, Hale (2004) suggested that community colleges increase their commitment to programs that more effectively serve the needs of their student populations. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded that institutions focus on ways to structure academic programs as well as interpersonal extracurricular activities on campus that promote student engagement.

Forbus et al. (2010) suggested that if colleges could truly serve student needs and increase their satisfaction, persistence and degree attainment would correspondingly increase. Lucas and Lammont (1998) found that students who were working were more confident and had better academic skills and social abilities than those who were not. Hence, work-study programs could be used by colleges to increase students’ satisfaction. Kulm and Cramer (2006) discovered that when students spent more time working on campus, their jobs provided them with the opportunity to socialize with peers and faculty, an activity which helped them succeed. To better understand the implications work-study has for student persistence, it is appropriate to take a
look to at the origins of the work-study program in general as well as in Connecticut, the site of
the present study.

The Work-Study Program and Financial Aid Overview

According to Gladieux, Hauptman, and Knapp (2005), the Tenth Amendment to the U.S.
Constitution reserved powers not delegated to the federal government for the states. Since
education was not mentioned in the Constitution, it therefore was not a primary concern of the
federal government as, say, the military was (Gladieux et al., 2005).

After World War II, the number of returning military in need of training for employment
increased dramatically, a situation which in turn changed America’s higher-education system
(Bean & Metzner, 1985). The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act passed in 1944 had the purpose of
making college affordable for veterans (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011b).
According to Brankston (2001), the G.I. Bill Act stimulated enrollment in higher education by
subsidizing the education of veterans who could use their benefits at any institution. With the
creation of The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the federal government’s support included
such other programs as the Federal Work-Study program (FWS), Supplemental Educational
Opportunity Grants (SEOG), National Defense Loans (now Perkins Loans), and Guaranteed
Student Loans (currently called Direct Loans) (Gladieux et al., 2005). A year later, the FWS was
integrated into the overall federal financial-aid system, with the initial purpose of providing
employment opportunities to students from lower-income families (Baum, 2010). During 1972
Congress passed the Higher Education Act (HEA), which had special provisions and expanded
financial aid for low-income students attending college (Scott-Clayton, 2011). With the approval
of all these laws, Congress established a de-facto commitment to higher education for lower-
income families. Still, although access to higher education was thereby increased, federal
funding proved insufficient, and the states began to take greater responsibility for higher education.

In the United States, states have “played an important role in providing funding to make college more affordable” and offer open access to higher education (Toutkoushian & Shafiq, 2010, p. 41). Despite significant amounts of federal and state financial support, state higher-education expenditures have not been able to maintain low tuition rates (Baird, 2006) and are not keeping pace with rising postsecondary costs (Weerts & Ronca, 2012). This gap represents an affordability-based access problem for both the community and community colleges, especially when most of the latter’s students come from low-income families (Fike & Fike, 2008). As a result, most of this student pool decided to work to become financially independent (Stern & Nakata, 1991). In general, existing state and federal funding ensures college affordability for children of middle- and upper-class families while in effect denying access to members of lower-income families (Baird, 2006). Moreover, students and their parents have the major responsibility for paying for higher education (Breneman & Finney, 1997; Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010; Toutkoushian & Shafiq, 2010)—a situation which should concern higher-education institutions, especially for its impact on the success of lower-income students (Tinto, 2005).

Thanks to the decentralized system of education in America, state commitment to higher education differs significantly from state to state (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010; Morgan, Kickham & LaPlant, 2001). It is no surprise, then, that tuition and fees differ as well (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010). As a result, postsecondary institutions are always in search of equilibrium whereby they can maintain adequate student success despite limited funds. Tinto (2005) described the importance of colleges investing the resources necessary to promote student
success. The question that arises is how colleges and universities can maintain such a commitment in the face of varying (and usually decreasing) state funding.

The current study took place at a community college in Connecticut. Through the Connecticut Aid to Public College Students (CAPCS Fund), each community college segregates its state appropriation into different CAP grants at the discretion of the financial-aid administrator (French, 2010). In addition, other portions of the grant are designated to cover on-campus work-study programs including a community-service component. According to French (2010), the Board of Governors of Higher Education received an annual appropriation for tuition, grants and student employment from the State Department of Higher Education equal to the amount required for the fiscal year for two prior years. In general, the state portion of work-study is appropriated to match the federal work-study approval received by the institution. The importance of work-study as a financial-aid component is that it has been shown to have a positive impact on student persistence (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Indeed, it was found to be the only form of support with a positive effect on degree completion (Adelman, 1999).

Currently, the model of public subsidies is under scrutiny. Moreover, it is being transformed from a needs-based to a merit-based subsidy (Baird, 2006; Toutkoushian & Shafiq, 2010). In addition, state support for higher education is significantly dependent on that state’s fiscal condition. If its financial situation is not favorable, elected officials tend to decrease state-based financial aid more than other state programs (Hovey, 1999). Thus the priority is given to such non-discretionary programs as state pensions and K-12 education at the expense of higher education (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010).

Similarly, it is expected that wealthier states spend more per person than those less affluent (Morgan, et al., 2001). In fact, on August 16, 2013, Connecticut’s governor, Daniel P.
Malloy, announced an “improved” financial-aid program (Yazbak, 2013). Under this newly created financial arrangement, the state work-study program was eliminated (Yazbak, 2013). The unintended consequence was that colleges were left with having to scale down their ability to offer employment to their students. In fact, the “improved program” they received amounted to reduced state support, a decreased capacity to offer grants and needs-based aid, and no state-funded work-study. As the College Board (2010) pointed out, it is the responsibility of college leaders to ensure that students who qualify for financial aid receive it, including work-study.

On another topic, Chen and DesJardins (2010) cautioned scholars, policy makers, and college administrators to be careful when considering the impact of financial aid within higher education. They asserted that students come from different backgrounds and as such might react differently to help they receive. In this context, Wang, Kong, Shan, and Kuan Vong (2010) noted that work-study has been researched as a homogeneous category. Instead, they argued that it should be studied as a heterogeneous category in which researchers take into account the varying academic and social outcomes for students based on the nature of the work performed, the work intensity, and the reasons the students accepted their particular jobs. Thus there is a need for future academic researchers to understand the implications for successful practice when considering state-support reductions, institutional programs cuts, and the repercussions for student persistence.

**Persistence Overview**

Historically, scholars have shown interest in exploring why students stop attending college, that is, in better understanding matters of retention and attrition (Seidman, 2005). Institutions of higher education are also aware of the costs associated with remediation. As the number of students with lower persistence levels increases, the institutions are affected
financially, with a negative impact on their overall stability (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004) as well as the overall economy of the country (Seidman, 2005). As a result, accountability became an important factor, especially in light of the growing requirements for standardized reporting (Leveille, 2005). Higher-education institutions are also interested in this topic because student success is the basis for colleges to survive and prosper (Bean, 2003). Persistence studies have evolved over the last 20 years (Wild & Ebers, 2002). During the year 2003 the overall persistence and degree completion in public two-year colleges in America was 56% (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). More recently, the comparable figure for 2012 was 65.9% degree completion (Shapiro, Dundar, Chen, Ziskin, Park, Torres & Chiang, 2012).

Persistence at its broadest level focuses on the reasons that students stay in or leave school. According to the Merriam-Webster online Encyclopedia, persistence is defined as the quality that allows someone to continue doing something or trying to do something even though it is difficult or opposed by other people. Likewise, Oxford University Press’s online dictionary defined the term as the fact of continuing in an opinion or course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition. Historically, academic persistence concerns how well colleges and universities are able to retain their students until graduation and avoid student attrition. Retention as defined by Seidman (2005) is the ability to maintain students enroll from admissions through graduation.

Braxton (2000) used various terms to describe the persistence phenomenon. He noted that these terms were used at two research levels: (a) when the aim was at the institutional level, scholars used dropping out, retention, and attrition, while (b) when researching at the student level; the scholars utilized descriptors such as persistence and departure. In general, persistence has been utilized differently. While Seidman (2005) defined it as a continuous enrollment
process from entrance through graduation, Bozick (2007) considered that students had persisted if they were enrolled continuously for at least eight months during an academic year.

For the purpose of this study, persistence means continuous student enrollment of students as described by Braxton (2000) at both the institutional and student levels. Attrition on the other hand is defined here as a student’s failure to re-enroll during consecutive semesters. That is, attrition is the opposite of persistence. This review focused on persistence because the terms utilized academically fit with the adult population selected for the current study. Also, it is important to clarify that persistence and resiliency are different terms. While persistence requires a continuous enrollment, a student who leaves for one or two semester might have the resiliency to re-enroll and eventually complete a degree program. Bean (2003) referred to this type of student as a stopout versus a dropout. In other words, after a student has dealt with a crisis or other adversity, their resiliency allows them to return to college and finish up (Herman et al., 2011). As a result, students who persist are expected to exhibit stronger resilience based on personal and community social-protective factors than dropouts.

Early persistence studies.

A short list of scholars has become associated with the literature of persistence. Spady (1971), for example, focused his early research on the effect that students’ background, school environment, and social integration had on their persistence. Spady argued that a positive institutional environment would lead to student persistence. Alexander Astin (1984) developed the theory that student involvement in campus activities could result in persistence. He theorized that the more energy a student devoted to campus activities, the more he or she would spend on academics. Moreover, he proposed that when students withdrew from college, the act stemmed from lack of involvement in extra-curricular activities (Astin, 1984).
By contrast, Vincent Tinto (1975, 1993) correlated student retention and departure with their degree of personal development (the student-integration model). In his model Tinto considered the student’s academic and social integration. The model was based on traditional students attending four-year residential institutions. In addition, it emphasized students’ academic expectations and the experiences they brought to the integration process. Tinto’s dropout integration model, or interaction theory (1975), focused on a student’s commitment to integrating themselves into college life. Tinto identified three main factors for a student’s departure: (1) their personal characteristics prior to entering college, (2) their experiences upon joining the college community, and (3) the impact of external issues on their college experience.

John Bean (1980) and John Bean and Barbara Metzner (1985, 1987) conducted several studies on retention among traditional-aged students attending four-year institutions. All three researchers nevertheless recognized the importance of background in attrition among nontraditional (older) students. That is, in contrast to Tinto’s model, they emphasized external factors like family influence, encouragement from others, employment, and a student’s intention to stay or leave college (Bean, 2003; Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey & Jenkins, 2007). Bean and Metzner (1985) also posited that certain subgroups (women and part-time students) reacted differently to different variables. Importantly, these two represent the highest enrollment groups in the community college selected for this study. The sample for this study in fact included part-time students and low income female participants.

Other empirical researchers examining environmental factors that affect student persistence suggested that higher-education institutions had the capacity to affect these factors (Pascarella, 1980). Donaldson and Graham (1999), for example, focused on class interaction and college outcomes. Their model, which differentiated adult learners from traditional students,
considered the classroom as a central and powerful component on the retention of the former. Terenzini and Reason (2005), moreover, took into account the roles of various interrelated actors on the academic success of older learners: the students themselves, the faculty, and staff members. These authors argued that their framework was applicable to retention.

In their research, Engle and Tinto (2008) identified what prior research had found to be risk factors for persistence: (a) being an adult learner; (b) being enrolled part-time; (c) working full-time; (d) being financially independent from parents; (e) having dependents; (f) being a single parent; and (g) being a GED recipient. Interestingly, these characteristics have been found to be descriptors of the typical community-college student. Consequently, these students are at special risk for leaving school before completing their degree.

Although it is important to understand the relationship between student background and college persistence, application of these theories to non-traditional students is not necessarily appropriate since the majority of the research was conducted on “traditional-age, full-time, residential student population” (Cox & Ebbers, 2010, p. 339), who have significantly different characteristics from adult students (Bean & Metzner, 1985, 1987). Torres (2006) also stated that the majority of retention models focused on full-time residential students of traditional ages. Their results were thus likely to be inapplicable when applied to non-traditional students attending commuter colleges or universities.

Tanka (2002) pointed out that college administrators should make sure to recognize the incorrect use of theories and research not directed to minority students. Joshi, Beck and Nsiah (2009), moreover, stated that every generation of college students is different given the differing economic and social conditions affecting them. There is as a result the need to explore the variables that affect each generation with regard to their college persistence. Terrell (1990)
offered a particularly critical argument about the assumption in which institutional policies and
practices were based, namely, that most of the programs developed to meet adult-learner needs
were disguised attempts to adapt these students to traditional ones. A better approach would be to
research adult learners’ experiences to understand and speak to their retention needs (Terrell,
1990).

Other scholars (Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1993; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2001;
Tierney, 1992) have criticized Tinto’s (1993) work for not having studied minority students. In
contrast, Castaneda et al. (1993) developed their student-attrition model by integrating the
concepts of Tinto and Bean. Castaneda et al. (1993), moreover, added that environmental factors
impacted student socialization at college and thus their academic experiences.

Earlier studies are still useful and provide value for this and future research. In fact, Settle
(2011) developed and tested successfully (with an 83.06% predictive percentage) a model for
year-to-year persistence for first- generation students. In his model Settle (2011) borrowed ideas
from such earlier models as Bean (1980), Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora and Hengstler (1992), and
Somers, Woodhouse, and Cofer (2000). Similarly, Crisp and Nora (2010) developed and tested a
model for community colleges that borrowed ideas from Tinto’s (1993) student integration
model, Nora’s (2003) student-institution engagement model, and Bourdieu’s (1973) cultural-
capital theory. This last model successfully found and tested predictive variables affecting
persistence.

Hence, the above two examples illustrate the importance of using and creatively adapting
early studies on student persistence in developing new theoretical frameworks. Furthermore,
these two examples illustrate the importance of studying under-researched institutions like
community colleges (Cox & Ebbers, 2010).
Financial aid, income level, and persistence.

When one researches studies in persistence, especially at community colleges, two key causal factors emerge: (a) financial aid and (b) the student’s income level. Because of the connection between the two, the following section contains an integrated discussion of these topics.

Many studies have found a direct link between financial aid and persistence (Cabrera et al., 1992; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Gross, Hossler & Ziskin, 2007; Hillman, 2010; Settle, 2010). For example, Tinto (1987) found that adequate financial aid equalized the persistence of lower-income and more affluent students without financial aid. Somers (1996), moreover, found that the type of financial aid influenced students’ persistence, with work-study proving especially impactful. Similarly, Engle and Tinto (2008) found that lower-income students were four times more at risk of dropping out than wealthier peers.

Students from lower-income backgrounds depend on financial aid to pay for their educations. In the United States four-year institutions are simply too expensive for lower-income students, who have to make significant financial sacrifices to attend them (Burd, 2003) or simply enroll at the much more affordable two-year institutions. Working while in school is yet another frequent recourse for low-income students who must offset the rising cost of tuition to remain in school (Curtis & Shani, 2002; Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn & Terenzini, 1996). Many higher-education students work because of financial considerations, while others simply enjoy working as an activity that enhances their social life (Curtis, 2007). Between 2005 and 2006, the cost of tuition and fees increased 11% at American community colleges (Baum & Ma, 2010). More recently, from years 2005 to 2011, tuition and fees in community colleges have increased between $500 and $1000, or at a lower pace than in the previous years (College Board, 2011).
These increases fluctuated widely from state to state. In 2013-3014, for example, the average tuition-and fees-increase was 1.5% after inflation, suggesting the smallest increase since fiscal year 2008-2009 (College Board, 2013). At the same time, federal and state financial support has been reduced (Chen & St. John, 2011). In recent studies, income limitation and the availability of financial aid were link to persistence (Bozick, 2007; Gupton et al., 2009). For example, Gross et al. (2007) found that 85% of the students who received financial aid persisted from one academic year to the next.

Other scholars have found that lower-income students persisted at a lower rate than those of higher income (Bozick, 2007; Gross et al., 2007). These scholars also noted that low-income students went unnoticed while they were persisting but were immediately highlighted as soon as they no longer maintained satisfactory academic progress and dropped out (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). As a consequence, Bean (1980) warned that if students had financial-aid worries, that factor alone could cause them to drop out. Dowd and Coury (2006) found that positive shifts in financial-aid policies (increased support) influenced persistence. However, when students had to find other means to pay for their education, their persistence was affected. For instance, Bozick (2007) found that working while in school and living with parents were predictors of low persistence. One possible reason offered was that students tended to work more than 20 hours per week, a fact that limited the time they could dedicate to study and/or get involved in co-curricular campus activities. Other research concluded that first-generation student persistence was linked to the amount and type of financial aid they received (Gupton et al., 2009).

Bozick (2007) found that low-income students attending community colleges were not aware of how to apply for financial aid or of the type of programs available. Therefore, they
were less likely to receive financial aid. One possible explanation is that because they were first-
generation students, they lacked the social and cultural capital from parents who did not have
college experience themselves. As a result, these students believed that college was not
affordable and that their options were to work to pay for college or live at home with their
parents to save money (Bozick, 2007). As these students became better informed and were
directed to the campus work-study program, however, they started integrating themselves into
the college environment. A further exploration of the impact of work-study on low-income
student persistence is presented below.

**College social integration and work-study.**

As mentioned early, two of the early scholars that studied persistence were Tinto (1975,
1993, 2005), who studied academic and social integration, and Astin (1984, 1993), who focused
on campus involvement. Tinto (1997) and Braxton (2008) referred to student engagement as a
key factor in their persistence and satisfaction. Tinto (2005) linked social and financial-aid
support as factors promoting success. Social support is that which originated from mentors,
faculty, staff and counselors. The following section presents a brief discussion of academic
integration. Since it is not the main aim of this study, the discussion will be necessarily brief.

As part of campus academic integration, scholars found that developmental education
played an important role in student’s persistence (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Fike & Fike, 2008;
Torres, 2006). Fike and Fike (2008), for example, concluded that developmental education
affected first-year students. Calcagno et al. (2007) had similar results for adult learners enrolled
in developmental math. Sorey and Duggan (2006) found that adult students enrolled in
occupational, technical, vocational degree programs had a higher probability of persistence than
those enrolled in general education. According to Fike and Fike (2008,) two-thirds of students
who completed developmental mathematics and reading courses had improved their rates of persistence. Hence remedial and developmental education has been shown effective in fostering student persistence (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). The importance of this finding is that many community-college students do not test well and are therefore placed in remedial and developmental education programs.

When considering GPA and students persistence, Kulm and Cramer (2006) found a correlation between student work and GPA; that is, the more hours a student worked over 20 hours per week, the lower their GPA. Perhaps these findings were more noticeable among students enrolled in developmental education because working more hours would limit their time to learn the basic concepts.

Significant empirical research has been focused on studying the impact of social integration and student engagement. Kezar (2003), for example, found that faculty as role models-mentors through their supervision and leadership increased engagements that led to persistence. Along these lines, research identified direct integration and participation in student organizations as one of the conditions that promote student success (Tinto, 1993). Domene, Socholotiuk, and Woitowicz (2011) found that students become more engaged in their course work if a direct link exists between classes and their desired career field development. Carroll, Choy, and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) uncovered a link between work-study, college integration, and student persistence. Zamani (2001) study found that non-traditional students could be stimulated to do better in their schoolwork through exposure to peers and through a college environment that promoted co-curricular activities.

Kirkham and Ringelstein (2008) noted that if students were involved in activities outside the traditional classroom and lecture hall, the likelihood of remaining in college were greater.
Other scholars saw a connection between involvement, integration, and environmental factors. For instance, Williams and Bryan (2013) found that environmental factors contributed to African American academic success: (a) at home, support from their parents or guardians helped them focus in school; (b) involved extended family members impacted their academic performance positively; (c) supportive relationships at school contributed to the students’ academic success; (d) school peer connections provided motivation to succeed in academic work; and (e) extracurricular activities in social organization influenced the students’ academic success. In addition, the study found that social support networks (encouragement, advice, and support) from friends, neighbors, and others, contributed to the academic success (Williams and Bryan, 2013). Lastly, this study found that involvement in community organizations influenced students’ academic success (Williams & Bryan, 2013). In general, the literature pointed to the importance of students’ involvement on campus and their relationships. These conclusions are important because they suggest further research into the experiences of students participating in the work-study program as a vehicle of student involvement, integration, relationships, and retention.

Miller (2006) referred to institutional engagement as any informal or formal campus relationships, that is, the overall student involvement in college activities with faculty, staff, and other students, not least through the work-study program. Tinto (1975) posited that supportive groups promoted students’ bonding and integration into the institution. Along these lines, multiples studies have found that on-campus employment fosters students’ relationships with peers and faculty, which facilitated student integration into campus life (Nora & Wedham, 1991; Pascarella et al., 1996). Moderate work (15 hours or less) yielded positive persistence outcomes (Astin, 1984) and promoted full-time student’s engagement (McCormick, Moore, & Kuh, 2010).
Campus integration was also a factor leading to persistence for under-prepared community-college students (Barbatis, 2010). As a result, students not involved in campus activities were at a higher risk for attrition (Kodama, 2002).

When considering work-study students and persistence, researchers found mixed and contrasting points of view (Riggert et al., 2006). For example, off-campus jobs had a negative impact on persistence owing to the limited on-campus socialization and integration time (Astin, 1993; Furr & Elling, 2000; Hammes & Haller, 1983). Curtis (2007) found that student workers’ perception of the work’s effect on persistence was different: positive for workers while negative for non-working students. In contrast, Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn & Terenzini (1998) discovered that during the first year of college, work hours had less impact on persistence. Kulm & Cramer (2006), meantime, found a correlation among the number of hours worked, success at study, and student time available for socializing. As this group of students spent more hours to be on campus, they were able to dedicate extra time to study.

Generally, Tinto (1992) criticized retention research which did not focus on factors like student interactions with faculty, staff, and fellow students. The literature is none the less clear on the importance of creating a collegial educational community involving all students, especially those who are first-generation to go on to higher education (Tinto, 1993). Kuh (2009) suggested the importance of college campuses’ maintaining an appropriate balance between the institution and student engagement. As has been documented above, the work-study program serves as a resource for both student integration and persistence as long as the students’ work load is held to less than 15 hours per week (Kulm & Cramer, 2006; Lundberg, 2004). As importantly, work-study helps students build relationships with all campus stakeholders, especially staff and fellow students.
Work-Study students, relationships, and socialization.

Studies linking work-study and persistence with faculty and peer relationships suggested that work-study provided students with emotional and academic support (Chickering, 2000; Crisp & Cruz, 2009); predicted learning (Lundberg, 2004); improved social life (Curtis, 2007) and academic and social integration (Crisp, 2010); and helped them acquire transferable work skills, increased confidence, and improved their time management (Watts & Pickering, 2000).

Various scholars focused their research on peer relationships and persistence. Nora and Crisp (2008), for example, found that mentors played an important role in students’ academic development. In fact, when students were shown how they could use mentorship, social support from family and friends, and academic support, their behavior towards persistence and college achievement changed (Torres, 2006). Likewise, peer-mentoring programs have been linked to success in helping freshmen with social issues related to adjusting to the college environment (Salinitri, 2005; Terrion & Philion, 2010). The literature revealed that student interaction with faculty was also positively associated with persistence (Barnett, 2010; Bensimon, 2007; Settle, 2011). One of the disadvantages of community colleges is that most of the faculty is adjunct and cannot dedicate enough time to develop quality relationships with students (Jacoby, 2006). Hence, a more holistic study of the work-study students’ relationships becomes pertinent for this review, especially at a two-year higher-education institution.

Clark, Walker, and Keith (2002) found that support from peer students was the most important variable impacting students besides the classroom. According to Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, and Jon (2009), 73.8% of the students indicated that peer interactions were a contributor to their college experience and satisfaction. It is important to note that although the research cited above was directed towards peer mentorship, findings can be applied to the work-study peer-
mentoring student population as well. Student workers at the site under study spent an average of twelve hours per week during the fall and spring sessions. In contrast, during the winter and summer breaks, student workers spent between 20 and 30 weekly work hours. This is significant because during these interactions, students bonded and established relationships with their peers and supervisors which could influence their persistence as earlier studies, mentioned above, have demonstrated.

Sorey and Duggan (2006) found that support from significant others, social integration, and the perception of their education being useful to obtain jobs had the strongest impact on student persistence. On the other hand, Lundberg (2004) found that when students worked part-time on campus and maintained constant high-quality interaction with faculty and peers, these factors were positively linked to student learning and persistence.

St. John (2004) found a direct relationship between financial aid and college engagement. He argued that students with financial aid had fewer financial worries and thus more time to engage in college activities. Similarly, Cabrera et al. (1992) found that financial-aid work-study helped students socialize with peers, provided them with some financial relief, and created extra time for co-curricular activities. In their study, Furr & Elling (2000) found that working nine hours or less on campus increased student-faculty relationships and positively affected persistence. In fact, studies conducted by Stampen and Cabrera (1986, 1988) showed that through work-study, recipients were exposed to relationships with faculty and peer students as well as to collegial policies and practices. Therefore, they argued that participation in work-study helped students integrate academically and socially and thereby stay in college.

Moreover, it is important to note that among the literature reviewed (over 30 peer-reviewed articles and textbook chapters on the topic of persistence and work-study, the primary
focus was on faculty and/or peers mentoring relationships (Chickering, 2000; Crisp, 2010; Salinitri, 2005; Terrion & Philion, 2010). The majority of these studies claimed that work-study students spent more time with faculty on campus. In reality, work-study students at the site of this particular study spent more combined hours at their job locations with supervisors (mostly staff) and peers than with faculty. These students worked between 20 and 30 hours per week during intercessions (winter, summer I, and summer II). Peer relationships as well as staff-supervisor mentoring have not been studied in this population to the best of the knowledge of this researcher, especially regarding the influence of these relations on student persistence. Hence, this is a gap in the literature that demands further research. In summary, in order to have a college climate where students feel satisfied, are successful and integrated, the campus environment must provide the resources for involvement (Nelson Laird & Cruce, 2009), and work-study has been documented as an effective way of involving them.

Summary

This literature review has revealed that research on work-study is complex and contradictory (Dowd & Coury, 2006; Riggert, et al., 2006). For instance, Dowd and Coury (2006) criticized the way the relevance of financial-aid studies to persistence has been conducted. They argued that these studies have used multiple quantitative methodologies which have produced mixed findings because of varying statistical samples, techniques, and study frameworks. These findings have helped the present researcher understand the importance of and need for further research regarding work-study as it relates to students’ persistence. For example, academic research has provided only limited information on the effects of the student-worker’s experience as it relates to staff mentoring relationships and persistence. Perhaps that lack explains why most recent scholarship have integrated earlier models because of the interrelation
of multiples variables: economic, academically related environmental variables, and social support in the study of student persistence (Cabrera et al., 1993). Tinto (2006-2007) revised model concluded that retention policies differed by institutional setting regardless of whether it be a two-year or four-year-college. Thus, findings in other institutional settings might not be applicable to the researcher’s Connecticut location. Other scholars have posited similar statements. Metz (2004-2005), for example, after reviewing 30 years of retention research concluded that institutions should focus on understanding retention predictors within their institutions. Davidson, Beck, and Milligan (2009) joined Tinto and Metz by stating that studies should focus on individualization at the student and institutional levels rather than on generalized research to fit all institutions. Because of these conclusions, there is a need to conduct the present study at the selected community college in Connecticut.

The literature findings have provided invaluable insights into the key factors associated with work-study and persistence. The literature overwhelmingly supports the findings that correlate student support from peer relationships and persistence (Chickering, 2000; Crisp, 2010; Curtis, 2007; Lundberg, 2004; Nora & Crisp, 2008; Salinitri, 2005; Terrion & Philion, 2010). The constant contact with and support received from faculty and peers positively affects school engagement and persistence. These findings are in alignment with those of the scholars studying resiliency, the framework for the current study. In fact, scholars studying resilience have found that relationships stimulating resilience have influenced persistence (Bonanno, 2005; Bowen & Martin, 2011; Chaskin, 2008; Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Mellow & Talmadge, 2005; Wilks & Spivey, 2010).

This finding has helped focus the present research in possible gaps. That is, the body of literature has focused research on academics and faculty-student relationships (Astin, 1984;
Barbatis, 2010; McCormick et al., 2010; Nora & Wedham, 1991; Pascarella et al., 1998), while ignoring the total hours (fall, spring, winter, and summer work intercessions) a work-study student spends with their peer and supervisors (in the study setting, supervisors are mostly staff). Hence, the importance of linking findings from studies on persistence and resilience with those on work-study that suggest a direct connection between students’ on-the-job relationship development and persistence.

As documented by the literature, future research should examine part-time students’ interactions with faculty and staff and the effect on persistence (Nelson Laird & Cruce, 2009) and the attitudes of university staff toward paid student employment (Curtis & Shani, 2002). Despite Curtis and Shani’s suggestion that future research be done on that population, it has been ignored. As a result, the literature has not provided enough research data that illuminate how these relationships influence the work-study students’ persistence.

Hence, working students’ interaction with staff and the attitudes of university staff toward such students warrant further research. One of the suggested measures that readers of this paper should take into consideration is the capacity of a college to offer on-campus work to non-traditional students which leads to improved integration of the latter into campus life. Kulm & Cramer (2006) found that working on campus helped students in the socialization process with peers and faculty. As a result, relationships and engagement with the college community is the second outcome found in this research as a significant predictor of students’ persistence.

The literature also suggests that the amount of hours worked is another important factor affecting persistence. When students worked less than 20 hours per week, a positive impact was found (Curtis, 2007). Conversely, when a student worked more than 20 hours per week, persistence was affected negatively (Furr & Elling, 2000). Perhaps these effects were caused
because the latter students had less time to engage with peers, in co-curricular activities, and with faculty and staff, let alone to study. This finding is important because school administrators should consider offering limited hours of on-campus employment to all non-traditional students: first, because it will keep them on campus longer and secondly, because it could improve both school integration and persistence. Hughes and Mallette (2003) have stated that because student employment occupies a significant amount of student life, it is an important topic for further research. The constant student generational change and advances in technology require institutions to reconsider the ways they stay in communication with the student body (Hannay, & Fretwell, 2011; Joshi, Beck & Nsiah, 2009). Economic realities force students to choose work over school involvement. This choice creates new challenges for administrators trying to bridge the gaps between education, work, and co-curricular activities (Furr & Elling, 2000). As Fraser (2004) noted, it’s important that all collegial stakeholders (e.g. administrators, policy makers, and college personnel) understand why some students succeed; otherwise, good intentions and efforts made become ineffective.

**Chapter 3: Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to analyze how work-study students made sense of their lived experiences of persistence at a community college in the Northeastern United States. By examining their persistence, educators, financial-aid administrators, and policy makers will gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of these lived experiences for student workers.

**Research Question**

The broad research question that was used in this study is—*How do work-study students understand the experiences that influence their decision to persist at a community college?* To
gain an answer to this central question, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview protocol that allowed for an exploration of the embedded complex components of the question.

**Methodology**

The method selected for this study was a qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The specific phenomenon under study was how work-study students at an American community college made sense of their experience of persistence presented in their own accounts and perspectives.

The rationale for using a qualitative approach for this research was its proven capacity to describe and explain social phenomena. According to Glesne (2006), qualitative research requires listening to the voices and stories of participants so as to interpret and retell their accounts. In this study the description focused on how work-study students attending a community college in the Northeast region of the United States perceive and made sense of their lived experiences of persistence.

This study follows the suggested approach of scientific qualitative research: recognizing the researcher’ conceptions, identifying the theoretical paradigms (constructivism), implementing the research strategy-design and IPA selection, methods of data collection (semi-structure interview) and analysis (Creswell, 2013). Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) described qualitative research as the process whereby researchers focus on how meaning is constructed by analyzing participants’ relationships, situations, and activities. Hoepfl (1997) stated the characteristics of qualitative research as these: (a) the source of the data originates in a natural setting; (b) the researcher is the source of data collection; (c) inductive data analysis is utilized, with themes emerging from the raw data; and (d) a detailed description of the data-analysis process is provided as an important characteristic of high-quality reports.
Hence the present study was designed to collect data in its natural setting through face-to-face interviews, the resulting data from which it was transcribed and analyzed in an attempt to make sense of and interpret the meaning of the participants’ experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Conversely, positivist scholars utilize quantitative searches (Butin, 2010) in which the voices of the participants go unheard (Creswell, 2013). Thus an interpretative qualitative study was more appropriate than a quantitative one for this particular investigation because the former aims to obtain a rich, in-depth analysis of the meaning of the work-study student’s experience of persistence (Creswell, 2013).

**Research paradigm.**

Burrell and Morgan (1979) posited that the interpretative paradigm focused on understanding the world in its natural state based on subjective experiences. Similarly, social interpretivism (also known as the “social constructivism paradigm”) was a good fit for this IPA study because the former seeks to unveil multiple individual realities which are analyzed and interpreted in depth as a way of finding meaning (Creswell, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). The goals of constructivist research is thus to rely on the participants’ views of a situation (Creswell, 2013) as well as the meaning they construct from it. In other words, the participants construct their own reality (Ponterotto, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Creswell (2013) argued that in a qualitative study of the meaning of lived individual experiences, researchers should mention their subjects’ philosophical assumptions: ontological—expressing the participants’ multiple realities; epistemological—gaining the closest possible access to the participants in their search for meaning; axiological—understanding their biases as they position themselves; and methodological—focusing on carefully collecting and analyzing data, the heart of inductive research. Hence the intention of this IPA research was to interpret
how the participants made sense of their perceptions (Reiners, 2012). As distinctive from quantitative research, there was no attempt here to establish relationships between the variables or conduct cause-effect research (Creswell, 2012). Rather, this qualitative approach focused on interpretation and the search for meaning (Creswell, 2013). In short, this study was a journey of constructivist discovery rather than one of correlation, causality, and variation associated with naturalist and positivist perspectives.

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.**

This practice-based research is grounded in the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method. This study aims to understand in detail the meanings of the lived experiences of persistence of the work-study student participants (Creswell, 2013, Smith & Osborn, 2008). Smith et al. (2009) described the goal of IPA as understanding how the participants of any given study make sense of life experiences. The following section describes IPA’s three theoretical axes and names the key scholars associated with this method.

IPA, introduced by Jonathan Smith and colleague scholars in mid-1990s, is a dynamic qualitative method first used in health psychology (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Inductive and interrogative (Smith, 2004), IPA research is a qualitative approach, psychological and experiential in nature, that is informed by three main theoretical axes: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy, concerned with individual perceptions of narrative accounts and objects, provides IPA’s foundation as a system that attempts to examine and understand the significance of lived experiences (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Husserl (1983) defined phenomenology as “the descriptive science of the essences and actions of consciousness” (p. 45). Moustakas (1994) focused on the importance of these experiences while van Manen (1990) stated that the purpose
of phenomenology is to gain a deeper understanding of the individual meaning of experiences. Along these lines, Smith et al. (2009) described the work of key phenomenological philosophers who contributed to IPA research: Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre “each contributed to a view of the person as embedded and immersed in a world of objects and relationships, language and culture, projects and concerns” (p. 21). Smith et al. (2009) added that the collective work of these philosophers helped move phenomenology from pure description towards the understanding of our connections to the world.

Finlay (2009) described three types of phenomenology: (1) that which is based on the researcher’s first-hand experiences; (2) descriptive phenomenology, which focuses on the essences of a phenomenon and emphasizes bracketing, or exposing the researcher’s biases; and (3) hermeneutic phenomenology, which emphasizes interpretation. Following an interpretative approach, Frank and Polkinghorne (2010) and Thomas (2006) suggested that phenomenology seeks to make meaning of individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon. IPA shares these interpretative characteristic. According to Heidegger (1962), the objective of phenomenological description is interpretation. In this context, Smith et al. (2009) and Eatough & Smith (2008) argued that IPA research aims to make sense of the meaning of lived experiences.

When the researcher begins to make sense of what is happening in the lives of a study’s participants, this interpretation process is referred to as hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). As mentioned above, hermeneutics is the second theoretical axis of IPA research and as such represents the interpretative approach (Smith et al., 2009). It is in this stage that the researcher employs “double hermeneutics” as described by Smith (2004), Smith et al, (2009), and Smith & Osborn (2008) as a two-stage interpretative process. That is, the researcher tries to understand how the participants make sense of their world. In this process, by emphasizing the whole to
understand the particular, the researcher must look at the particular to understand the whole (Smith et al., 2009).

Reflecting on Heidegger’s writings, Smith (2007) stated that “priority should be given to the new object rather than to one’s preconceptions” (p. 6). Therefore, the researcher should be conscious of the preconceptions that could represent an obstacle to interpretation (Smith, 2007). The researcher’s role must be active, iterative, and dynamic since it is not possible to know beforehand which part of our preconceptions will affect our interpretation of the phenomena under consideration (Smith et al., 2009). As part of the financial aid management team, the researcher’s role is administration for the college’s work-study program. For instance, the participants of the study are work-study students; hence they are familiar with the researcher in his administrative role. Although the researcher acknowledges possible authority imbalance, it was reduced through dialog and full disclosure with the participants. The rationale was to gain the participant’s trust and understanding of the newly researcher’s role. In addition, the researcher might have had preconceptions about student workers’ experiences. Hence, instead of limiting the interpretation of findings, the researcher’s own conceptions aid in the sense-making of the participants’ personal world through what Smith and Osborn (2008) referred to as “interpretative activity” (p. 53). As Smith et al. (2009) suggested IPA combines the hermeneutics of empathy with a hermeneutics of questioning, with the goal of “drawing out” the meaning of the experiences (p. 36).

The process of drawing out meaning by taking into account a detail examination of each particular case is what Smith et al. (2009) described as the third IPA theoretical axis, ideography. The ideographic approach calls for a focus on the details of a particular case. Through finding similarities and differences in each case, the researcher can help others understand how particular
participants experienced the phenomenon in question (Smith et al., 2009). In this process, the researcher iterates going through the data in a search for meaning. Hence IPA is ideographic because it focuses on the details of accounts and thereby provides a depth of analysis (Smith et al., 2009). As Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005) noted, IPA analysis seeks to focus “on what is distinct” but also aims to find what is shared by the participants (p. 20). The idiographic focus thus allows IPA researchers to examine one case in detail before moving on to the next case.

The rationale for the utilization of IPA for this study is that it addresses the need to understand the details and particular meaning of lived experiences of college persistence on the part of work-study students as a way to discover how they understand and construct their world (Smith et al, 2009). Heidegger (1962) posited that interpretation is important when studying people because they are embedded in a holistic world that includes languages and social relationships. Thus in this study the students’ world includes the relationships they develop as a result of participating in the college’s work-study program. The main justification for the selection of this method of research for the present study is thus that IPA enables the researcher to describe meaning through interpretation of the participants’ realities, sense-making, and experiences (Converse, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Smith et al., 2009).

**Participants.**

During the year 2010, 41% of Connecticut community-college students were adults, that is, age 24 or older (State of Connecticut Department of Higher Education Report, 2011). According to the Director of the Office of Institutional Research (of the college studied here), the majority of enrolled students are non-traditional, that is, 71% are adult females enrolled part-time, and of those, 70% are minority (J. Wang, personal communication, February 10, 2014). Hence, as recommended by Smith et al. (2009), this study was conducted within a homogenous
group of individuals in terms of this community-college’s non-traditional student population (adult, minority, and commuter). The individuals studied also shared the experience of persistence while participating in the local work-study program.

It is recommended that IPA studies should be conducted with small samples (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The rationale for this approach is that it allows for a detailed interpretative and in-depth engagement with the students’ particular accounts (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Like general phenomenology, calls for a small sample of between three to ten individuals (Creswell, 2013) IPA calls for a sample between three to six (Smith et al., 2009). Originally Smith (2004) suggested focusing on a single case in contrast to previous studies, which utilized samples that fluctuated between five and six. A few years later, Smith and Osborn (2007) suggested that for graduate students new to IPA studies, the sample should be limited to three case studies. This conclusion was confirmed by Smith et al. (2009), who considered three to be the ideal sample number for a graduate student’s first research project.

This IPA research required a sample known as a purposeful homogeneous sampling. Creswell (2012) stated that in this type of sample “the researcher purposefully samples individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics” (p. 208). The rationale for purposeful sampling is that at the particular level it provides an individual’s perspectives, which are ideal when one is conducting a qualitative study (Creswell, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). Moreover, at the level of details, this sort of sampling allows the researcher to select individuals who have experienced the phenomenon the most. This approach aids the researcher in finding similarities and differences (Smith et al., 2009).

In this study the sample number consisted of six individuals whom were interviewed. To recruit the participants, the researcher initially sent an invitation to ten (10) students in two
formats: email (See Appendix A.), and, to ensure the students have received the communication, a hard-copy with the same information as the email was sent by surface mail. The aim of sending ten invitations was based on the likelihood that some candidates would opt not to participate. Four participants accepted the invitation to participate in the study. To reach desired sample goal, a second round of ten additional invitations were sent. As a result, two additional individuals accepted which fulfilled the sample goal. The intention was to have an adequate sample for the study which scholars suggest will assure an in-depth picture of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Smith et al., 2009).

The researcher selected those individuals who shared certain characteristics and provided rich information from their experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Patton, 2002). The sample criterion included participants who are over 24 years of age, be in their second year of college as well as individuals who have enrolled continuously while participating in the college’s work-study program. The aim of this type of sampling was to seek a detailed and particular description of the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2013) because the selected participants were experts on the topic (Reid et al., 2005). As Smith et al. (2009) noted, “They ‘represent’ a perspective, rather than a population” (p. 49). See Appendix B for a sample of the demographic of the student participants selected for the present study.

The participants, all current or former work-study students at the same community college, provided rich, detailed accounts of their understanding of their experiences of persistence. A brief presentation of the participants’ background information is described below. Six students accepted the invitation to participate in this study. Five of them were females and one male. All of them were eligible to participate because they had registered for more than three
consecutive semesters during which they did work-study. All moreover were non-traditional students.

Josh, a twenty-seven-year-old, was single without dependents. He had enrolled during four consecutive semesters before transferring to a four-year college in fall 2014. Josh’s graduation GPA was 2.62. He had been living on his own while enrolled at the local community college, mostly part-time. He had been employed in two work-study jobs, in each of which he was supervised by college staff.

Sophie was a thirty-eight-year-old student, a single mom with one dependent. Enrolled during three consecutive semesters, she transferred to a four-year college in fall 2014. Sophie’s enrollment pattern was variable: sometimes a full-time student and on other occasions part-time. Her graduation GPA was 3.56. Sophie worked three consecutive semesters while participating in the work-study program. She worked at the same location throughout and was supervised by college staff.

Cecilia was a fifty-year-old married student with three children. For seven consecutive semesters she participated in the work-study program. She is currently enrolled in her eighth semester. Although she has changed majors several times, she is now close to finishing her community-college degree. She is currently enrolled part-time and her college’s GPA is 2.40. Cecilia’s work-study assignment has been the same for seven consecutive semesters. Like all work-study students, she is supervised by a college staff member.

Serenity was a forty-five-year-old single mother with two children. Although currently adults, they still live with her. Serenity enrolled for four consecutive semesters while participating in the work-study program and is now one class away from completing her associate degree. Serenity’s GPA is 2.62. Earlier in her enrollment, Serenity was attending full-
time but then transitioned to part-time status. Serenity has worked at the same location during her four semesters.

**Altagracia** was a fifty-one years old, married, and the mother of adult children. Having enrolled for four consecutive semesters, she is currently in her fifth while continuing to participate in the work-study program. Altagracias’ GPA is 2.92. Throughout her community-college career, she has been enrolled part-time and has continued in the same work-study assignment.

**Roxy**, the final interviewee, was a thirty-three-year-old single mom with three dependents. During her five consecutive semesters of enrollment, she has participated in the work-study program. Recently, she has graduated and transferred to a four-year college beginning during the fall-2014 semester. Roxy’s graduation GPA was 3.26. She was enrolled half-time in community college while participating in the work-study program. During that period, Roxy worked at two different locations.

**Site, recruitment and access.**

The site selected for this study was a community college located in the Northeastern region of the United States. The college is located downtown in a mid-sized city comprised of economically depressed urban areas. The institution serves a diverse multicultural group of students from around the world. Prior to beginning the study, the researcher sought permission to gain access to the site and conduct the study from the president and the dean of the division from which the students will be selected as well as from the participants themselves. At the same time, permissions were acquired from Northeastern University’s IRB Committee. All the permission-request forms are attached as appendices to this study. A general overview of the study and related explanations was provided at a meeting held on campus or during a phone call.
purpose of the meeting or call was to discuss each candidate’s availability for an interview, provide an overview of the study, and respond to any questions about the study (Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

One of the foundations of this research is that it should be conducted ethically. For those individuals who decide to participate, a study description was presented in a simple language easy to understand. In addition, the role of the researcher as the main investigator of the study rather than the authority figure represented by his position as work-study coordinator at the college was clarified, and each participant signed a consent permit (See Appendix C.).

The interview days were set during the first meeting. The participants verified the transcript data summary during the last meeting, and any new information was added. As a result, to reach data saturation during the iteration process, another round of questions were conducted in the third interview (Patton, 2002). The researcher offered the participants the opportunity to decide on the location for the interview (Seidman, 1998). All six participants preferred to be interviewed on-campus for their convenience, thus, the researcher accepted their choices. Understanding the participants’ willingness to participate on this study, reciprocity was considered. Although no inducement or payments were offered, a gift card with a nominal value of $25 was given to all the participants to thank them for their time, effort, and participation. Finally, all standard ethical research practices were followed for the protection of the human subjects involved.

**Data collection.**

The data collection instrumentation/measures in this study included multiple semi-structure interviews, data from the iteration process and follow-up conversations with the participants (Smith et al., 2009), memos, observations (Creswell 2013), and the utilization of the
college’s demographic database (Butin, 2010). For example, for each participant, the researcher extracted their enrollment data to confirm persistence as well as other demographic data like age, marital status, the number of dependents, and other data related to worked hours and class attended hours (See Appendix B.). These demographic data provided a social understanding or context for each participant’s perspective (Smith et al., 2009).

To generate a rich detailed description of the life-worlds of the participants (Willig, 2008), multiple one-on-one in-person semi-structured interviews were conducted. Although the length of the interviews varied, the researcher initially estimated that each would run from one hour to one-and-a-half hours. In reality, the interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes each. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012) there are two types of in-depth qualitative interviews, semi-structured and unstructured. Researchers tend to use semi-structure interviews when they have a specific area that they want to learn about and hence craft questions that could answer their concerns. They might even create follow-up questions for emerging issues or for qualifying ambiguous responses to earlier questions. Hoepfl (1997) posited that semi-structured interviews are a good tool for time management and for keeping the interview focused. By the researcher’s asking open-ended follow-up questions, the interviewee is freed to respond in any way he or she decides (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Because this study sought to understand the phenomenon of community-college persistence, the use of semi-structured interviews seemed most appropriate. In this regard, an interview protocol was created following the main research question by considering it in the context of persistence and resiliency (See Appendix E). One of the advantages of semi-structure interviews is that they allow for an iterative process between the researcher and the interviewee which can uncover meaningful issues arising in real-time. In addition, when participants have
difficulties answering questions, this type of interview allows the researcher to provide cues to help the latter understand the question asked (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The main disadvantage of utilizing the semi-structured interview format is the length of time required to conduct the interviews and analyze the data versus the shorter time needed for quantitative studies (Smith, 1996). All interviews were recorded digitally and via audiotapes for later transcription by the researcher. To ensure the quality of the audio recording, interview locations were chosen for minimal distraction for the participants. During the third and last interview, a summary of the transcriptions was shared with the participants for the purpose of clarification, validation, and accuracy. This process allowed for the posing of additional questions (Creswell, 2013).

This study utilized student enrollment data obtained from the college’s Banner database system to help supplement the data gathered through the interviews (Butin, 2010). The purpose of these data was to verify the students’ enrollment, persistence while participating in the work-study program, as well as demographic data containing the student’s characteristics that make them eligible for participation in the study. This step was conducted when selecting the participants to ensure they share similar characteristics.

Observations taken during the interview process were also noted and utilized as additional data (See Appendix C.). Creswell (2013) found that observations help the researcher create “significant statements or quotes” that aid in interpreting the participants’ understanding of the phenomena (p. 82). This effect enables the researcher to gather important data about the particular cases that could generate follow-up questions and additional valuable information. Further, students’ reactions to questions are important and not necessarily recorded during an audio-taped interview. Thus it is important for the researcher to write down any observation of
the participants’ emotional reactions. As a result, these observations aid the researcher’s interpretation by providing additional details about the three case studies (Smith et al., 2009).

Once the interviews were transcribed, memos and data chunks were utilized. The term *memoing* is typically used when one is conducting grounded-theory research. Memos are created from the data collected (Creswell, 2013). However, since this research was an iterative process, the researcher understood that memoing could benefit this IPA study. The main purpose of memoing is to write short phrases and key concepts that may be helpful later on when one is identifying major themes emerging from the data (Creswell, 2013). In fact, this process is similar to step two of IPA’s initial noting (Smith et al., 2009) in which the researcher’s emerging ideas are written down in discrete chunks of data related to his or her evolving interpretation.

In accordance with IRB guidelines on confidentiality, data and records from this study were stored and safeguarded in a locked, fireproof filing cabinet. The cabinet keys and access was limited to the researcher. All research material including consent forms and interview material including tape-recorded interviews, notes, memos, observations, and transcripts were kept in the researcher’s office space in a locked cabinet. As mentioned above, only the researcher had access to these data. Any computer data, moreover, was kept in a secure, password-protected computer. In addition, voice-recorded tapes were destroyed immediately after their contents were transcribed. First, the tape was inserted into the tape recorder and recorded over until the interview(s) were deleted. Then the tape was removed and destroyed. Similarly, digital recordings were erased from the electronic device where they were stored. The researcher adhered to the principles of data storage as described by Creswell (2013): (a) a backup copy was created to prevent loss of data. This backup information was stored at the same location in the
researcher’s office, and (b) the researcher developed a master list of the types of information
gathered which recorded the location of specific data from the study (Creswell, 2013).

**Data analysis.**

IPA data analysis is a reflective process between the researcher and the accounts reported
in the transcripts. The first two steps aim at getting close to the participants’ world by reading
and re-reading the transcripts. The researcher wrote down tentative first conclusions about
interesting components in the transcripts (Smith et al., 2009).

IPA is similar to Creswell (2013) qualitative research data analysis suggestion. That is, it
should include at least: (1) reducing the data into themes; (2) preparing and organizing the data;
and (3) representing the data in forms of tables or discussions. Moreover, Creswell (2013)
asserted that qualitative researchers should use inductive and deductive logic when creating
patterns and themes out of the collected data. Creswell (2013) and Smith et al., (2009) added that
the inductive approach involved the researcher’s iteration process between the transcript and
themes until they formed an ideal set. Further, Creswell (2013) noted that there was a deductive
approach component whereby these newly created themes would be verified against the data.

DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) stated that themes provided meanings for lived experiences. One way to accomplish effective note-taking from the data for making meaning is
through coding the data. Marginal-transcription memos further assisted the researcher in
exploring in details of the data collected (Creswell, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). In this regard,
Saldaña (2013) encouraged the use of *In Vivo* coding in qualitative research. This process
involves “themeing” data to ensure that the description utilizes the participants’ own words to
help the researcher detect patterns and categories in multiple sets of data (Saldaña, 2013).
Through this process, portions of data are analyzed to ascertain the particulars of the case being studied. Hence for this study, transcripts were transcribed immediately, before the following interview occurs. During this process the researcher had a better map in the developing of memos and themes which helped construct follow-up questions for the next set of participant interviews. Smith et al. (2009) posited that through these conceptual notes, the researcher is able to shift to an overall understanding of the participants. Furthermore, after the interview data have been synthesized, the researcher was able to create significant statements. This process included finding similarities and contrasting views among the cases but also providing details when patterns of connections among the data occurred (Smith et al., 2009). Thus the goal of the present research was to create statements that will provide an understanding of the participants’ experiences gained from their involvement in the target community college’s work-study program (Creswell, 2013).

Before the data analysis of the study continued, the researcher described personal experiences through epoche, or revelation of possible researcher bias (Moustakas, 1994). This step is necessary in IPA because it tends to be self-reflexive and reduce researcher bias. Although Smith et al. (2009) posited that bracketing can be only partially achieved. Hence, as the researcher using a cyclical approach self-reflects on his experiences, it allows the analysis process to continue. Through the “lessons learned” interpretation process, the researcher analyzes and reduces data from broad subjects to more specific emerging themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process created a chart of superordinate themes (Smith et al., 2009). The process is then repeated for each of the three case studies. The researcher was cautious about the influence of one case findings toward those of another; hence, bracketing the ideas that have emerged from each case is essential (Smith et al., 2009). The next step in the analysis required
the researcher to compare the three case charts for connections that illuminate the understanding among cases with the intention of presenting a holistic chart that represents the themes for the group (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher’s last step, then, was to write up the results (Smith et al., 2009).

**Trustworthiness.**

The term *trustworthiness* is associated with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) standards (Creswell, 2013). This researcher utilized Creswell’s (2013) and Smith et al.’s (2009) recommended term *validation* because it represents a process: the field research, deep description, and closeness to the participants in the study. The process of validating research is a major concern in any qualitative study. To maintain credibility, the researcher made sure the findings represented and were consistent with the participants’ reality. Moreover, the purpose of validation in qualitative research is to check for the quality and accuracy of the results of the study (Creswell, 2013). There are various strategies to ensure validation.

Smith et al. (2009) warned that research validity must be flexibly based on what is most suitable for a particular study. Smith et al. (2009) recommended following Lucy Yardley’s four broad principles: (1) being sensitive to the context of the transcript which relates to its idiographic axis; (2) being attentive and sensitive to the participants during data collection and maintaining rigor in the sample selection, the quality of the interviews, and the steps in the analysis; (3) being transparent in the way all the stages of the research were conducted, descriptively providing details on how the sample was selected, the interview schedule was created, and the interviews were conducted. Furthermore, the write-up must be coherent. That is, it must align with the philosophical assumptions of the research so that a reader can be sure the study has followed the IPA method’s established principles; and (4) providing the reader with
useful and important new knowledge. Creswell (2013) suggested eight validation strategies, with a caution that any qualitative study should employ a minimum of two. For this reason, this study utilized Yardley’s principles of validation as suggested by Smith et al., (2009) but also incorporated three of the eight strategies recommended by Creswell (2013), namely, rich and thick description, member checking, and epoche (bracketing).

In qualitative studies, the perspectives of the researcher and participants are considered. The main goal is to ensure that the data collected are accurate, credible, and reliable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, those goals were accomplished through the quantity of time the researcher has spent in the field. That is, the time spent interacting with the participants during the various interviews helped provide the data for a thick description of the experiences and thus add value to the study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher, moreover, provided the reader with an in-depth, rich, thick description of the reported experiences which helped provide data saturation for the interpretation process. According to Creswell (2013), the purpose of reliability is to measure consistency in research. Thus, the reliability and dependability of the study were measured through appropriate categorization and theme creation; that is, by the way categories emerged during coding and how the researcher made decisions in the course of the study.

To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the study, participants were given the opportunity to review and correct data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the use of member checking as a way to add validity to a study and as a tool to corroborate the information. To accomplish this task, after the second interview with the participants was completed, a third interview was then conducted so that each interviewee could check their data (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Further, meaningful conversations were held during the third interview. The logic behind this feature was to allow for participant validation, that is, to give them the
chance to provide feedback and corrections to the data already collected (Smith et al., 2009). As a result, lively discussion was able to be held about any topic they believed important and any necessary corrections were made.

Because of this study’s basis toward phenomenology and the nature of axiological research (Creswell, 2013); bracketing is essential in IPA to ensure credibility of the data (Smith et al., 2009). Utilizing the hermeneutic cycle (Smith et al., 2009), this researcher self-reflect about the work-study coordinator’s role through epoche (Moustakas, 1994). Such self-reflection, or commenting on past experiences, understandings, and biases that are likely to shape the interpretation of the study, is a proven way to reduce or eliminate researcher bias. For instance, the researcher is a male administrator who might interpret female experiences based on his own perspectives, which could differ from those of females. Additionally, the researcher college’s experience was as a first-generation student who attended a traditional four-year college. These experiences differ with the current study student’s body, geographical location and culture. Together, these differences could influence the way data is interpreted. Thus after positioning his stance within the study, the researcher was reflexive and interpreted reported data as provided by the participants (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher’s bracketing thus included information about his background, role as an administrator, experiences, and interpretations. To reduce any possible bias, the researcher held a brief meeting with the participants to build their trust in the process and to answer any questions and concerns they might have about the study. In doing so, the researcher bracketed any preconceived ideas about the possible relationships of work-study students and college persistence when he is analyzing the data later. Through this process, the findings and conclusions of the study became more valid and trustworthy.
As part of assuring internal validity, the interviews for this study were conducted during different times. No interview was conducted within the same week. The number of participants selected was six, as recommended by Smith et al., (2009). A possible threat to the internal validity of the study was the location for the interviews. To reduce any type of risk, all on-campus interviews were held at times that did not interfere with the researcher’s work schedule or the students’ classes. Another possible threat to the study, as mentioned earlier, is researcher bias. However, through the use of epoche, the researcher’s self-reflective process made any such biases explicit and therefore reduced the threat to the study’s validity. At the end of the study, the researcher provided those participants interested with a copy of their transcribed interview. In addition, those interested in the results of the study will be provided with an electronic copy of the full thesis once it has been approved and is ready for publication.

**Role of the researcher.**

The researcher is an investigator in search of understanding the subjects’ experience of persistence while (and as a result of) working at their work-study jobs. It is the sole responsibility of the researcher to identify, contact, and select the individuals who were interviewed for this study. A review of the relevant literature about the topic of persistence and the framework of resiliency helped the researcher identify gaps related to the problem, which created the need for the study (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Creswell, 2013). Briscoe (2005) posited that having a privileged position could cause participants to alter their answers if they knew the interviewer. Hence the researcher remained conscious about his position in the participants’ community college and was sensitive to the possibility that this power imbalance could marginalize the participants of the study and made sure that such marginalization did not occur. As the work-study coordinator, the researcher’s role is the hiring and job placement of
students. Part of the hiring process includes assisting students with the completion of human resources paperwork, the explanation of different processes such as time-sheets completion, pay periods’ schedule, payment, and work-study polices. During each work session, the coordinator is also responsible of monitoring students’ performance which includes: follow-ups with supervisors, and students’ yearly evaluations. At the end of each work session, the hiring process is repeated when the work-study supervisors request student workers for the following session (fall, winter, spring, summer).

Ponterotto (2005) noted that qualitative researchers often “bracket” themselves. Giorgi (1985) and Polkinghorne (1989) made reference to the suspension of all judgment about an experience and suggested the exploration be limited to the words of those who have experienced it. Understanding that it is almost impossible to set aside researcher bias totally, IPA advises researchers to use the double hermeneutic; that is, the researcher makes sense of the sense-making of the participants (Smith, 2004). Therefore, the researcher’s accounts and interpretations needed to be reflective, understanding how these previous notions could influence one’s research (Finlay, 2009).

Christians (2005) and Mertens (2006) argued that researchers must be aware of different problems that could arise and influence the investigation, e.g. deception and invasion of privacy. The study’s “pure” stage is based on the findings reported from the participants’ perspectives and ends with conveying the meaning of those perspectives (Dowling, 2005, p. 132). In fact, by utilizing axiological assumptions as a work-study coordinator, the researcher will avoid deception. The rationale is that student workers might be familiar with the researcher. As a result, the researcher held an initial meeting with the participants to go over the ground rules as a way to build trust in the process. Additionally, the researcher explained to the participants that
during the research process, the researcher’s role was to be other than that of the person who coordinates the Work-Study Program. In any event, an interpretative phenomenological analysis represents a good tool to use for unveiling meaning and understanding the interviewed work-study students’ experiences of persistence.

**Limitations.**

The current study was conducted in the Northeast of the United States with a non-traditional community-college student population. Therefore, findings in this study cannot be transferred to other populations that differ in geographical area, are comprised of four-year degree students, and have other characteristics that differ from a non-traditional (adult-single parent-minority-commuting) community-college student. The size of the sample was small; hence a larger sample could generate totally different results from the current study. The very nature of IPA double hermeneutics limits the findings to the interpretations of the researcher. A different interpretation might be made when researchers focus at different levels of the same transcribed data. Additionally, as stated by Smith et al. (2009), a psychoanalytic analyst would likely have a different interpretation since this type of interpretation theorizes from without rather than from within the text of the transcript. However, despite these limitations, it was the study’s aim to contribute to the research of community-college work-study students’ persistence as seen from their sense-making. The goal was to further inform policy makers, financial-aid administrators, and student-affairs administrators about the implications of these community-college work-study students’ experience of persistence.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

As a scholar-practitioner, the researcher is responsible for conducting this study ethically by precluding any potential risk that might cause harm to the participants. For this reason, the
researcher was sensitive to ethical considerations that might negatively impact the college where the study was conducted. He also protected the participants by allowing them enough time to respond to all questions (Creswell, 2013). The participation in the study was voluntary. Briggs and Coleman (2007) posited that voluntarism is a principal aspect of ethical research. Additionally, to comply with ethical considerations, adequate permissions to conduct the study were acquired from both the Northeastern University IRB Committee and the appropriate officials from the institution where the study was conducted (All permissions are attached in the appendix section). Mertens (2006) suggested the need for cultural sensitivity, collaboration, respect, and tailoring of the research procedures to the population being studied. According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), a researcher must be respectful of all other persons involved in a study, offer no abuse or harm to the participants, and be committed to being just to all concerned (National Institute of Health, 2013). In the study of vulnerable populations, protection can best be achieved through confidentiality and risk reduction (Butin, 2010).

In consequence, protection was given to all participants in this study, especially to vulnerable groups where applicable. Cooper and Schindler (2003) posited that in order to have validity in research, the interviewees’ privacy must be guaranteed. All participants were given a consent form, which was signed before they took part in the study (See appendix D.). This form included detailed information about the study including (a) its purpose; (b) a reassurance that limited risk is involved; and (c) the potential importance and benefits of the study. Along these lines, the participants’ identities have been kept anonymous. To accomplish this task, they were given the opportunity to select their pseudonyms. For instance, no interview document, record, or research material contains the participants’ actual names. Moreover, all interviewees’ information and rights have been protected. They were informed that they had the right to
withdraw from the study at any time. In fact, based on the advice of Cooper and Schindler (2003), the participants were instructed that they had the right to refuse answering any questions. Therefore the researcher pursued meaningful ways of building trust with them. To comply with the guidelines for research with human subjects, all participants were treated with respect. Furthermore, any risk that could cause harm them was minimized, and all individuals were treated fairly.

Owing to the researcher’s role as work-study coordinator, he was up-power to the student participants, especially given that they will all continue to be employed by the program which he manages. Therefore any inappropriate pressure on his part was rigorously avoided (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To reduce discomfort or intimidation, a full session of questions and answers about the researcher and the study took place during the first meeting. The rationale for this process was to allow the participants to perceive the researcher’s friendliness and genuine focus on the research. Through this process the participants came to see the transparency of the entire process. Finally, at the end of the study a symbolic gift card was given to all the participants as a way to thank them for their time, effort, and participation.

**Conclusion**

Given the nature of this qualitative research study and the research question, an interpretative phenomenological analysis study has been found to be a good fit to enable the researcher to understand the meaning of the lived experiences of persistence on the part of these community-college work-study students. Thus, the research design was appropriate because it addressed the research question with an appropriate methodology. With a sample of six individuals, the study data provided an in-depth, rich, thick description of the meaning of these students’ experiences. The data-collection format enabled the researcher to garner insights into
how work-study students make sense of their persistence despite their other life challenges. In fact, one-on-one, open-ended semi-structured interviews facilitated data collection, kept the research on track in terms of time, and helped the study to stay focused. Moreover, through analyzing the data, the researcher intended for this study to provide new knowledge about the meaning of the experiences of persistence for this group of work-study students who are attending a community college in the U.S. Northeast. Lastly, a final narrative describing the meaning of the work-study-students’ experience of persistence was written and presented.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this research process was to explore and describe how work-study students make sense of their lived experiences of persisting at a community college in the U.S. Northeast. The broad research question that guided this study was: *How do work-study students understand the experiences that influence their decision to persist at a community college?*

These overarching themes, derived from ten nested sub-themes as follow: (1) Coping with Stress: (a) Developing Supportive Relationships, (b) Finding and Using Coping Mechanisms; (2) Engaging in and Welcoming Environments: (a) College Socialization and Involvement, (b) Belonging to an Inclusive and Multicultural Collegial Community; (3) Developing Personal and Professional Identities: (a) Professional Growth, (b) Gaining Self-Confidence, (c) Achieving Goals; (4) Acquired Time-Management Skills: (a) Using Time Well While Working at the Office, (b) Convenience and Learning to Prioritize Their Time.

Table 1 provides a list of the superordinate themes with the corresponding nested sub-themes.

Table 1

*Recurrence of Themes per Participant and its Frequency*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUPERORDINATE THEMES</th>
<th>Corresponding Nested Themes</th>
<th>Josh</th>
<th>Altagracia</th>
<th>Serenity</th>
<th>Cecilia</th>
<th>Roxy</th>
<th>Sophie</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COPING WITH STRESS</td>
<td>(a) Developing Supportive Relationships</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGAGING AND WELCOMING ENVIRONMENTS</td>
<td>(a) College Socialization and Involvement</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Belonging to an Inclusive, Multicultural Collegial Community</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEVELOPING PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES</td>
<td>(a) Professional Growth</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Achieving Goals</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACQUIRED TIME-MANAGEMENT SKILLS</td>
<td>(a) Using Time While Working at the Office</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Convenience and Learning to Prioritize Their Time</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Below a detail analysis of the superordinate themes is presented.

**Coping with Stress**

This first theme is based on the different types of stress the work-study students were exposed to and the types of coping mechanisms they developed to persist in their studies. After the data were individually considered, it was then looked at for the whole group. It was found that all the interviewees coped with stress in a similar way. When asked if they ever felt like leaving college because of stress and how they coped with it, the participants expressed a variety of stressors. Paying for their education amid other bills represented a burden and constantly affected them. They also reported having health problems that in some cases made it difficult for them to persist. In several instances the participants dealt with trauma from the loss of someone close to them. As a result, the participants perceived that the support they received from the relationships they had established as they worked on campus became key factor in keeping them in school as they pursued their degrees. Thus the connections they developed with supervisors, peer workers, faculty, and the college community (other members of the college) were significant when they made their decision each term to re-enroll.

It is important to note that all six participants worked in college areas where the supervision they received was strictly from the college staff. Such an arrangement is typical of college work-study programs. Thus the terms supervisor and staff will be used interchangeably throughout this document.

The interviewees also sensed that certain benefits associated with socialization on campus helped them cope with stress. They felt that such interaction made it possible for them to continue working, studying, and persisting at school. In addition, the participants’ interview responses helped explain how they coped with stress. As a result the researcher identified three
nested themes discussed below: Developing Supportive Relationships, Finding and Using Coping Mechanisms, and Benefiting from College Socialization and Involvement.

**Developing Supportive Relationships**

The participants understood that finishing their degree was going to present them with some challenges. They were nevertheless clear that obtaining a college degree was an achievable goal. All of them mentioned that they had developed supportive relationships with supervisors, other staff, and peers at the office where they worked. They had also created supportive relationships with faculty and the college community in general. Altogether they viewed the support they received as a way to cope with the stress associated with attending college. Cecilia articulated that gaining the trust of her supervisor helped her move forward with her degree aspirations. She felt encouraged by the latter’s advice to maintain good grades. As Cecilia stated, “It took people helping me and me accepting their help.” Similarly, Altagracia felt encouraged by her supervisor as she struggled academically. As she put it, her supervisor “shed light on the situation.” This support made her feel “thrilled to be part of the work-study program” because they [the people involved in it] were very supportive of her goals. Sophie on the other hand felt the support from her consideration of future benefits: “Getting the paper [her degree, would enable her] . . . to find the job outside.” Josh felt support from the work-study office in terms of mentoring by the staff. When he and his fellow student workers were going through stress, the supervisors would take them aside and encourage them. As they considered how working on campus influenced their studies, the interviewees in general emphasized the importance of having received encouragement and support from their supervisors throughout their time on campus.
After student workers are assigned to their work locations, they interact with fellow students assigned there and other nearby job stations. This study finds that the participants understood that support from peer workers was also an influential factor in the participants’ re-enrollment decision-making process. In describing how the peer support received from other student workers helped her, Altagracia stated that she had “received input about what type of classes to take for the next semester.” Similarly, Serenity explained how she obtained information about the professors teaching any given class that she was planning to enroll in during future semesters: “[I] talked to peers about the type of professors and that influenced my decision to enroll in any particular class.” These two cases show how peer support was utilized to deal with the uncertainties of the registration process.

Roxy, Josh, and Altagracia all expressed how they were encouraged by peer workers academically or when they were under stress. Josh for example stated, “When I felt like leaving college, I talked to peers; they took me aside and advised me. I had good people around me; they influenced me to get up in the morning and want to come to school.” Altagracia reflected on how she had learned to be more disciplined after interacting with peer workers: “I got support from other peer student workers. They helped me discipline myself.” The general consensus among all six participants was that peer workers support was important in helping them deal with the stress associated with the college registration process as well as with non-academic stress.

The academic support the students received from faculty and other members of the college community is worth mentioning here also. The participants’ understanding of their experiences and therefore their responses varied. For example, Sophie, Roxy, and Altagracia mentioned receiving some kind of support from faculty or from the college’s Learning-Tutoring Center. Sophie met with faculty two times per semester as well as when seeking a better
understanding of her winter seasonal depression. Roxy was hospitalized several times during one semester, but she attributed her completion of that semester to the support she received from professors, classmates, and the tutor who assisted her in recovering the material taught during the days she had lost to illness. As Roxy put it, “Tutoring was important. Every time I needed support, I went to Tutoring.” Altagracia utilized Tutoring services too but in addition was aided by the college community as a whole. As she said,

I went to Tutoring, but most of the support occurred during my work-study time. The support that I received came from people with multiple backgrounds. The experience gained was priceless. You interact with students, faculty, staff, and about everyone around the college.

There was general agreement among the participants that non-academic support was more important to them. When asked about how they dealt with stressing factors, they immediately talked about the personal and professional type of support they had received from the college community. They limited academic support to class-related issues but mentioned receiving academic support from staff and the Tutoring Center as well as their professors and fellow students.

Cecilia for example felt helped when dealing with very difficult family issues: “Everybody in the college was willing to help each other.” When dealing with an ill family member, Altagracia felt the same: “When father got ill, I was discouraged. [But] after I talked to the financial-aid administrator, classmates, peer workers, and my supervisor, I felt someone cared and got encouraged.” Roxy on the other hand stated, “I had some personal struggles, I felt like leaving college, but I had my work family that encouraged me and helped [me] to stay focused on my goals.”
Altagracia, Cecilia, Roxy, and Sophie all mentioned family as a key part of the support they received that helped them stay in college: As Cecilia put it, “Family encouraged me through difficult times.” Altagracia and Roxy stated that without their family support, it would have been extremely difficult to go to college. Different from these participants, Josh did not mention family support in response to any of the questions asked. Instead, he emphasized several times during the interview that the motivation he received came from his peer workers and a close friend he had made as a result of being at his work location. It seems as if he had found the support he needed through the college community rather than at home.

After interpreting the participants’ experiences in the aggregate, they believed supportive relationships were the most significant factor influencing their success in college. This theme was discussed by them throughout the interview process. Without the support from supervisors, other staff, co-workers, classmates, the college community, and family members, the participants expressed that it would have been extremely difficult for them to continue attending college.

**Finding and Using Coping Mechanisms**

In dealing with different types of personal stress, all the participants developed coping mechanisms that helped them stay in college. Cecilia, Josh, and Altagracia faced traumatic life experiences that caused them significant stress. Cecilia for example was dealing with family illness. She had a mother sick with Alzheimer’s whom eventually died, a son that was going to be sentenced to jail for eight years, and a daughter in a wheel chair who suddenly got very ill. As she described her struggles, it was evident that Cecilia had suffered serious emotional trauma from these situations. During the interview, the drastic change in her demeanor and the sadness that these stressing factors put her through while at the same time attending college and working were observed. Cecilia stated,
I felt like I have to break myself in a few pieces, be there, and then come here for the orientation, start classes and knowing all this—it is not easy. And when I got home, right there, I wanted to quit. If I would’ve quit in that moment, I wouldn’t [have] come back. Because I know my problems were not going to go away . . . sometimes I thought that I was going out of my mind.

When she was asked how she coped with such difficult times, Cecilia immediately reacted with tears in her eyes as she said, “I managed.”

I had to deal with one issue at the time. First, I go to classes, then work, and last, deal with family issues. I basically used going to work as ways to ease the stress I was going through. But I also had family support. At the end, I had to make a decision to drop one class to save the others.

Her quick response was both surprising and a sign of the “never-say-die” attitude which enabled her to continue attending classes regardless the severity of the family stress she was undergoing.

Josh responded to this question with a similar scenario. He is a very independent individual that prior to his work-study job had no connections at the college. Once he started working and interacting with different members of the community, he became close friends with a classmate who used to visit him at work. Suddenly, his friend died—something that was quite traumatic for Josh. It was observed how Josh used the language to denote the struggles he endured at that time. He stated that the situation was “very, very hard.”

It was very, very hard; so stressful for me. I never really had somebody, I was . . . I never had somebody that I was so close to, and it was gone the next day. That was actually one of the most challenging things that I had to go through when I was in school here. It was very hard.
During this part of the interview, Josh paused and became silent for an instance. Then he continued by saying that despite the loss, “you put a smile on your face and go through things. I dealt with it by talking to co-workers and supervisors.” Despite feeling lonely, Josh mentioned that he had absorbed the loss of his friend without seeking support from any school advisors. Perhaps he was referring to what he perceived as males in his age range’s reaction would have been had they been faced with similar scenarios. He continued by stating that “I had to put [on] a happy face” and keep working and going to college. He managed to cope with the stress by sharing the loss with peer workers and his supervisor. In fact, Josh stated that as taught by his supervisor, he utilized music therapy to help him calm down and have a clearer mind to make his decisions:

To me music is a big part of my life, so you know, it takes a ton away. I played a song that has some motivational message such as “don’t give up” from Bob Marley, and that helped. I knew everything was going to be all right after those three minutes. So you know, I call it “musical heaven.”

Altagracia shared a similar experience when dealing with the illness of her father who was suffering from an advanced stage of Alzheimer’s. As a result, her father required constant attention. Altagracia felt pressure to quit college to be able to take care of her ill father. When asked how she had coped with this stress, she responded, “I had to drop some classes or change my schedule really drastically, but I also had a lot of encouragement from people who I worked with.” She also referred to her faith as a mechanism she used to cope: “I am a firm believer that the Lord provides, and through all my challenges, there have been in angels helping me get through.”
Despite suffering traumatic experiences, Cecilia, Josh, and Altagracia coped with their stressful situations in different ways. They sought support from the people who were working with them, they adjusted their class schedules, and they sacrificed some courses to deal with life stress that was affecting their academic performance. Cecilia used her own work environment to isolate herself from stressing thoughts. By focusing on the moment she could temporarily disconnect from other stressing issues. Altagracia understood that her faith gave her hope which helped her deal with her challenges.

Serenity, Roxy, and Sophie perceived that other than academics, their stress derived mostly from financial concerns, although Sophie had the additional issue of winter-seasonal depression. “It was challenging when I got affected by winter-seasonal depression but had found support from my professors who helped me understand it.”

These three students were parents. Thus having to provide for their families while attending college was a stressing factor for them. Serenity, for example, compared how raising two kids and providing for them became a second job for her. During the interview she repeated that her schedule was not easy. She stressed that “it was very, very difficult, but I managed.” Here she was referring to the stress caused by the dual responsibilities of child-rearing and college.

When asked how she supported herself, Serenity stated that she had had no source of income other than the work-study program and state assistance. Likewise, Altagracia worked occasionally in other part-time jobs, but she counted on the income generated from the work-study program: “I do work when I can, work whenever is available, and then I have the work-study program. Of course, that’s important for me, that’s a definite plus and something I can
count on.” Roxy also articulated how she supported herself and her children when attending college:

While in college, I support myself with the means of financial-aid assistance, especially the work-study program. But it also includes financial support from grants, scholarships, and loans. I also receive support of my family and friends. One semester I accepted a part-time position outside college to supplement my other resources. Later, I realized that it was too much. It became overwhelming, and I had to quit.

Different from the previous three participants, Serenity, Roxy, and Sophie believed their financial concerns were the primary source of their stress. These three individuals utilized financial-aid support, especially the work-study income which eased their financial stress. Roxy and Sophie in particular used the strategy of terminating temporary jobs outside college to focus on maintaining their on-campus jobs to cover some of their financial needs. Roxy in particular found that having an outside job was overwhelming for her and only added to her stress. Below, Table 2 presents a graphic summary of the findings about stress culled from the participants’ accounts. The sources of stress are presented followed by the coping mechanisms they developed which helped them manage and at the same time stay in college.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>STRESSING FACTOR(S)</th>
<th>COPING MECHANISM(S)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>Traumatic Stress:</td>
<td>Supportive Relationships:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Loss of a friend</td>
<td>• Supervisor and Peer Co-Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Music Therapy – “Music Heaven”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altagracia</td>
<td>Father Ill with Alzheimer</td>
<td>Dropped One Class to Save the Others</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Changed Schedule</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supportive Relationships:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· Supervisor and Peer Co-Workers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tutoring and On-Site-Work</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor’s Academic Support</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work-Study Financial Aid</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Academic Stress</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Financial Stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serenity</td>
<td>Financial Stress of Raising a Family</td>
<td>Work-Study Financial Aid</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tutoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia</td>
<td>Traumatic Stress:</td>
<td>Dealt with One Issue at the Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Mother Ill with Alzheimer – Died; Son sentenced to prison for 8 years; and Daughter in Wheel Chair and very Ill</td>
<td>Used Work as a Way to Ease and Disconnect from Stress:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· Working helped her forget her problems.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supportive Relationships:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· Supervisor, College Community and Family</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Stress</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Roxy</td>
<td>Financial Stress of Raising a Family</td>
<td>Work-Study Financial Aid</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Terminating Outside Jobs</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Supportive Relationships:</td>
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<td>· Family and Friends</td>
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<td>Tutoring</td>
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<td>Sophie</td>
<td>Financial Stress of Raising a Family</td>
<td>Work-Study Financial Aid</td>
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<td>Terminating Outside Jobs</td>
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<td>Supportive Relationships:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Faculty and Supervisor</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

While participating in the work-study program, all interviewees found coping mechanisms that helped them deal with various types of stress. For those whose stress factors came from life, family and any mental traumatic events, the significant stabilizers were found to be supportive relationships from supervisor, peer workers, faculty and family. When the stress was associated to economic concerns, the work-study program and other sources of financial aid was perceived as fundamental for the participants’ continuous enrollment. Lastly, when
academic was the stress factor, support from supervisors, peers, and tutoring centers became important tools for these participants’ college re-enrollment. Likewise, the participants also adjusted their class schedules which included dropping a class to perform well in the other classes. The interviewees sensed that working on a welcoming campus environment was an important piece that would help them to negotiate and find support to cope with all types of stress.

**Engaging and Welcoming Environment**

The college’s adult student population has to balance life, work, and a college education. Owing to these factors, this demographic can be sometimes more sensitive to the college’s environments. They are always evaluating what is around them, what benefit they can obtain from it, and how practical it is for them to commute to any given college. Thus, the second superordinate theme in this study captures what the participants perceived as an engaging and welcoming environment that led to their decision to re-enroll. The nested subthemes (identified in italic font) emerged from how the participants viewed and understood their environment. They considered working in college as an opportunity to make new contacts and socialize (college socialization and involvement). After working for a while, they started developing feelings of belonging to the collegiate community. These feelings were reinforced by what they perceived as an inclusive multicultural atmosphere that, among many benefits, provided them with the convenience to go to work and earn extra income while they attended college.

**Benefiting from College Socialization and Involvement**

The participants understood that working on campus provided them with the opportunity to spend extra time around the college. As Roxy stated, “It [the work-study job] allowed me to build beneficial relationships.” Serenity went further and added that the opportunity of having
been selected for the work-study program gave her “the chance to socialize professionally but also personally. It helped me make friends.” Josh on the other hand saw his job as a full-out socialization process:

On the one hand, it was basically me attending to new students, new applicants. It was just like any customer-service job. You know, dealing with a lot of people. You have to put a smile on your face, you have to be very helpful, you know, consistent, and giving them the right information. My job also allowed me the opportunity to interact with people who had similar aspirations. Yes, we shared the music major as a common interest.

Most importantly, Josh reflected on the individual who had entered college in contrast to the individual who he had become. He explained how the socialization process had facilitated how welcomed he now felt:

Before I started working, I came to the college and left home. I had no interactions whatsoever; I had no friends nor connections. Now I have made lot of friends, I know I have found a good job, and above all, I have good people around me.

Serenity assessed her experience in a way similar to Josh. She had the opportunity to interact with people:

Although you are not there the whole day, you have the chance to interact with everyone. After I finished my task, I had the chance to make new friends, go to the Career Development Office and start looking for job opportunities. It gave me a chance to work as a team member where there is always somebody willing to assist you when needed: with my homework, to mention one example.
Sophie saw working on campus as the opportunity to make connections. She found easy access to information that she could utilize to find a job, improve her resume, apply for state jobs, and write cover letters. As she put it, “It was a whole networking experience with the staff. I got to know about the process of applying for new state job openings.”

The participants also assessed how working on campus and the resulting socialization allowed them time to get involved in other extracurricular activities. Cecilia, Altagracia, Josh, Roxy, and Sophie all mentioned having been involved in activities other than work or academics. Only Serenity stated that because of her hectic family schedule, she barely had time to get involved in campus activities.

Cecilia, for example, described how through her work-study, her supervisor had kept her involved and participating in organizing the college graduation. She was asked also to help in moving staff from one office to another. Altagracia’s experience and involvement were similar. She explained how her supervisor allowed her to participate in the college commencement planning and encouraged her to attend different activities in the auditorium. She was also involved with her supervisor in fundraising and participating in a legislative breakfast. She referred to these as “real-life experiences.”

Josh reflected on the type of involvement he had had in other college activities. He referred to his work group as a “team” in which he had developed strong feelings of belonging. He described how together they played jokes when peer workers had their birthdays and how they had attended different college events:

We would go to presentations, college orientations, and any type of functions like music functions, and we always tried to go as a group. It all depended on our schedules, but we tried to go as a group and go to any function and just have that comradery with each
other. Personally, I was also part of the college’s Scholar Program that helped students participate in the college’s Bridge Program. I was part of various college clubs: the West Indian club, the Rotary Club. You know, it just helped me out networking with people and learning different things, different cultures.

Roxy described how her supervisor had invited her to attend college presentations and such other activities as serving on the search committee for a position that had just opened. She also described how she had been elected to the college’s Student Senate. Sophie, although she admitted that she had little time left because of family responsibilities, nevertheless attended presentations and workshops in the auditorium and was involved with the Leadership Honor Society:

I visited the auditorium for presentations, things that other students and other classrooms presented. I went, sat, and just listened to what they had to say. One of these presentations was about the topic of immigration. I felt confident about participating because I am an immigrant, and I was asking questions and involved in the presentation.

I was also involved as a volunteer during a conference related to the area I was working for as a work-study student.

Through the involvement in campus activities, these students established professional and personal relationships. Roxy and Serenity for example, found value in building these type of relationships. Josh associated his job with helping new students and interacting with people who shared similar interests. Having developed a sense of team work and comradery, he took the opportunity to get involved in various college clubs. Serenity and Sophie had the chance to network with other college offices in pursuit of better job opportunities. Cecilia, who socialized
with different college staff, was active participating in the college’s graduation ceremonies and other special projects around campus as designated by her work-study supervisor.

In addition to socializing on campus, three participants mentioned being involved in extra-curricular activities through college clubs or groups. Only Altagracia, Serenity, and Cecilia did not mention belonging to college clubs; however, they were active in other college activities. As detailed above, Sophie was part of the Leadership Honor Society, Roxy was a member of the College Student Senate, and Josh was involved in the West Indian and Rotary clubs. Hence, Sophie, Roxy, and Josh believed that their positive involvement in these groups had influenced their decision to stay enrolled in college.

As a group, all the participants understood that part of their successful experience of college persistence was associated with the level of socialization they had achieved and the degree of involvement they had developed in campus activities and clubs. They attributed their success in both areas to being able to work on campus and have extra time to get involved instead of having to leave to go to work at an outside job. All the interviewees responded that they had been able to socialize, and half of them indicated that because the college made them feel included, they felt welcomed to join in extra-curricular activities.

Belonging to an Inclusive, Multicultural Collegiate Community

As a result of having been part of the work-study program, the interviewees had all been exposed to the college’s welcoming environment and the student socialization and involvement process. In this way the participants began to develop feelings of belonging to the college community. As a group, they described how they had felt from the moment they started attending college and joining the work-study program. In an analysis of the interview transcripts, one finds each individual expressed feelings like being at home, appreciated, and understood;
being in a place with high camaraderie, especially among the work group; and finding themselves able to make friends even though they were working.

Cecilia and Sophie openly expressed that working on campus and being exposed to the college environment made them feel as if they had a second home: Cecilia for example made this statement:

I work three to four hours daily and then go to classes for one-and-a-half hours. It feels like a second home. They appreciate what I do, they count on me, and when I am not here, they miss me. It does not feel like I am working. I interact with people, get paid for what I do, plus it working at college helps me deal with stress.

Altagracia on the other hand expressed her attachment to her work location. “I felt like I belonged there, no questions were asked. I received just pure support.” Roxy looked at it as a more professional experience by having been given the opportunity to serve on a search committee. She stated,

The work environment was so awesome, an awesome experience for me because my opinion was valued and respected. I took so much pride in my work-study. They understood that I had a lot of experience in the field. They knew that I had a different but important point of view. I felt very thankful for the opportunity and experience.

Josh understood his experience as one where he was able to connect: “Work-study made me feel part of something.” He assessed how having friends who expected him to come the next day and work motivated him. “The camaraderie helps you change your mindset from depressed to having a good attitude. I had a good job to come to and good people waiting for me to come.”

The participants assessed how they felt a multicultural environment contributed to their enrollment. Roxy for one sensed that the presence of different races and cultures was a “positive
environment.” Altagracia also said she felt very comfortable, encouraged, and welcomed. Josh, Cecilia, and Sophie were even more passionate about the importance to them of a multicultural campus. Cecilia felt that this diversity made her forget her ethnicity or think about it positively because she sensed that all her fellow students were “in the same boat.” In other words, all were going through similar experiences while in college:

We have all ways of life here. When you are here in the college, you don’t think about I am Hispanic, Black, or White. Everyone here gets along well. We look for each other. Everybody here is in the same boat. I don’t think I have met one person that cannot say I know what you are going through. I have been there myself.

When asked if there were something not brought up during the interview that they believed was an important influencing factor for them to stay in college, both Josh and Sophie mentioned the college’s multicultural student body as something which helped them engage and socialize. Josh in fact requested extra time to articulate his experience:

The college environment is really good. I mean, you have all types of cultures walking through. You may find someone from Nepal, you might meet somebody from India, and you might meet somebody from Russia. It is like a melting pot in here. So, it is very, very interesting when you come to this college and, you know, you meet different people. The atmosphere is very warm and welcoming. It makes you want to come back the following day; you want to be part of it.

Likewise, Sophie expressed her feelings of being part of an environment where she felt she belonged, one where she related to others’ experiences as models to follow:

The college has a very diverse community. In my case, being an immigrant it is good to feel not left out. I felt welcomed here because of that diversity. I also had lot of
professors that were diverse and were students before. They showed us how at one point they were there like us, and now they teach. I felt like if they were able to do it, so could I.

It can be concluded that the participants’ interactions with staff, faculty and peers while working in a welcoming multicultural campus environment gave them a strong sense of belonging to the college community. They understood that these experiences allowed them to be significant contributing members of the community. Thus, helping them see clearly that they were valued for whom they were as college students instead of being considered as different, non-traditional students. This resulted as a motivating factor, which gave them persistence to continue working towards their degrees and re-enrolling in college. Viewed as a group, the participants of this study experienced the process of socialization and involvement on campus, they developed feelings of belonging promoted by an inclusive multicultural collegiate environment that allowed them to growth both personally and professionally.

**Developing Personal and Professional Identities**

The interviewees were asked to compare the person they were when they first entered the college with the individual they had become at the time of the interview after having been part of the work-study program and having had different college experiences. All the participants described how they had become more professional individuals. Either they had learned how to dress professionally, had gained new skills, and/or had learned how to write a resume. They also commented retrospectively on how they had changed as individuals from the time they started working in their designated jobs. They had experienced the development of both their selves and their professional identities. All of them mentioned having been shy when they entered the work-study program and how they had become more extroverted. In addition, the participants stated
how as part of their development they had become able to set personal educational goals and how they had worked to achieve them.

**Professional Growth**

The students in this study understood they had developed professionally through the work-study program. Cecilia for example acknowledged that before she had started working on campus, she had not been aware of offices having a professional dress code. She assessed what learning this fact had meant to her in terms of professional growth:

Dressing appropriately . . . it helped me project a more professional image. Before I was wearing jeans and t-shirts. Now I wear skirts and black vests, you know, making sure that I dress appropriately for the job because I feel that I represent the college. In addition, by working in different offices, I gained additional office skills.

Sophie’s comment resembled Cecilia’s. Sophie saw professional growth in terms of learning the expectations of the people around her and viewing them as role models: “Lot of people around me had reached their goals, and they were passing that on to me, their successful work experiences.” But Sophie also felt the responsibility for improving herself and doing the job well:

I understood the responsibility I had when working in my designated location. You don’t want to let the supervisor and other staff down; you understand your responsibilities; you become more accountable for your actions, your work, and school. It helped me prepare for the real jobs outside. The work-study program meant a change of everything for me.

In like manner, Serenity saw her professional growth in terms of expanding her possibilities for new job opportunities.
As a group, the interviewees acknowledged gaining general-office and other skills by going to different professional campus presentations. The students felt they were developing into more professional individuals. Serenity had helped her supervisor coordinate a variety of workshops, which she also participated in. Altagracia did the same by volunteering at work-related conferences. Cecilia understood that her professional growth came in part from participating in different college activities: Spanish week, Black History Week, college presentations, and job fairs. Roxy felt that her professional growth was based on having acquired new knowledge and having been allowed to participate in a search committee to recruit a new staff member. As she stated, “it such participation helped develop the independent professional I am today.”

It can be concluded that not only did the participants understand the important role their work-study experience played in their successful college experience, but this new experiences also helped develop their personal and professional personas as they were exposed to new roles: work-study professional role and student’s role. Furthermore, their involvement in different professional activities such as their daily required work and academic duties, aided them to witness an increase in their self-confidence.

**Gaining Self-Confidence**

As the participants of this study acquired new office skills and job experience, they were sure they had developed their self-confidence and acknowledged these changes. In reflecting on her experiences, Sophie stated that working on campus had changed everything for her: “It helped me find myself.” When the students were asked how they saw themselves before and after their work-study participation, their responses were similar but also individual.
Roxy, Cecilia, Altagracia, Josh, and Serenity described having been very shy when they had enrolled in college and how much working on campus had changed them. Roxy related this change in terms of her classroom work: “I was very shy to ask questions. After working for a while and interacting with different people, I started to open up and felt comfortable asking questions.” Roxy felt so confident that her experience motivated her to serve as a role model for other students. In reflecting her experience, Cecilia noted the transformation she had gone through from a shy to a very confident person:

When I came to the college, I didn’t have a clue. I was very shy and didn’t speak to too many people. I had no connections with the college. The job helped me come out of my shell. Now, I speak out. It helped me to come out, to be myself. Now I feel like I can help more; it feels like I am in the right spot to work. Now I can handle myself in any situation. I feel I can help others based on my experiences.

In describing her experience, Altagracia described her transformation in this way: “At the beginning, I was kind of lost and confused. I felt very discouraged after being out of college and trying to find employment outside.” She also reflected on being given the opportunity to work. She stated, “I felt trusted again, felt useful; it helped develop my personality from being discouraged to becoming outgoing, I changed from a discouraged to a confident person. After working for a while, I felt happy and never felt like giving up school and work.”

Josh shared various experiences. At first he felt like a “fish out of water” when entering college without knowing much about how to enroll:

It was kind of hard for me a little bit because I was like a fish out of water, and I didn’t know what to do. Everything was kind of discouraging at first. But then, after gaining
some experience and starting working, everything changed. I knew I had a job to do, and that helped my confidence.

Secondly, Josh narrated how he had grown from being shy about speaking in public to being more comfortable speaking out. He described his feelings when he first entered college, especially having to speak out in public and how he feels now after having experienced the work-study program:

The work-study program impacted my studies too. One thing I don’t like doing is speaking in front of people, and me being in those two jobs on-campus made me interact with a lot of people. It kind of helped me a lot with classes, especially my public-speaking class. I really get nervous, but the jobs really helped me speak out and interact with people.

Similar to the previous participants, Serenity experienced being shy at first but felt that being part of the work-study program helped her overcome that obstacle and develop her confidence:

Working on campus has given me a lot of confidence. When I first came and went to other offices and had to ask questions, I was very shy. I did not have much self-confidence. I was insecure and felt like, “Oh my-gosh; I really hope they can help me.” When helped by peer work-study students, wow that opened up my eyes and made me wonder if I could be doing that someday. Now, I work in one of the offices helping students, parents, and everyone. So all that experience gave me confidence; it changed me from a shy student to a very confident individual.

The participants attributed being more confident individuals based on the experience of being working and interacting around campus. As they became more knowledgeable about the collegiate life, felt closer to the people around their job locations, they became more involved
academically, part of what they sensed was an increase in self-confidence that lead to their success. This resulted in the acquiring of a positive knowledge about the collegiate life and closeness to the people around their job locations. That helped them become more academically involved, which gave them the strength and the self-confidence that led to achieve their academic goals.

Achieving Goals

The participants felt that setting goals and aspirations helped them develop their professional and personal identities. When asked about their college goals, they unanimously cited finishing their degrees. Serenity expressed feeling very motivated to finish her degree. Josh described that beyond finishing a media degree at the community college, his goal was to later transfer during the fall 2014 to a four-year college. For their parts, Roxy, Sophie, Altagracia, and Cecilia all knew what their goals and expectations were. Roxy wanted to finish a degree in the education field while maintaining her Dean’s List status. Roxy felt these expectations would help her become more successful in the future. Sophie wanted to finish her first associate’s degree and soon learned that she could double major and get a second degree before transferring to a four-year college: “I never stopped. I picked the other program, and now I am pursing both: Social Work with a minor in Psychology.”

After reflecting on her life, Altagracia disclosed how she had waited 20 years after graduating from high school and had raised a family before she returned to college: “I knew when I came back to school that I’d have to work hard and push my way through.” She was referring to adapting to the college experience after being out for so long. Now she felt determined to finish her degree, which she believed would help her “develop into a more professional individual.”
Cecilia assessed her experience in trying to finish a nursing degree. First she had wanted to pursue a nursing degree but had gotten drawn into significant family issues that had limited her academic goals. Meantime she had decided to enroll in a medical-assistance degree program. Although her goal was still to get a nursing degree, she was taking such allied-health classes as nurse’s aide work, billing and coding, and currently medical assistance. Her understanding was that so long as she had family issues, she did not want to enroll in the nursing classes. Instead, she took related courses that would help her develop the necessary professional knowledge that later would assist her in pursuing the nursing degree.

In summary, these results demonstrated that as a group, the participants of this study felt that having a clear goal in mind, helped them become successful. They had a strong desire to finish their respective degrees, which allowed them to solidify their career goal, successfully pursue it and be fully employed upon their graduation. Having this particular motivation and goal helped them keep focused. For some of the participants, they felt this was the last opportunity to obtain a degree; hence, they expressed having a desire to fight for what they sensed was an achievable goal.

The participants became aware that the added responsibilities of working on campus, attending classes and managing their personal responsibilities, would require organization and time management to be able to accomplish their goals.

**Acquired Time-Management Skills**

The participants were asked to state what they had learned from work-study. Almost all of them felt they had acquired time-management skills. With the exception of Josh, who did not mention having a busy schedule; although he attended school, worked and was part of several college clubs, the rest of the participants had hectic days between attending school, raising kids
in some cases, and working the hours they needed, all of which required them to organize their

time. When asked whether their schedules had influenced their decision to enroll, the participants
all stated that time was important for them. They understood that part of their success was based
on how well they were able to organize their schedules and learn to manage their time. In their
accounts they mentioned that their time was spent working at the office, taking classes, and
living life. Thus, as the participants went through the process of setting goals, organizing their
daily routine, and setting-up their daily schedule, they were effectively managing their time and
prioritizing.

**Time Spent Working at the Office**

Prior to the interviews and before asking the participants to describe what their normal
work day was like, the researcher utilized information from the college’s Banner data base to
ascertain the amount of hours they worked versus those dedicated to classwork (their hours
enrolled per semester). The aim of utilizing this information was to make sense on how the
participants perceived that they were spending their time around campus.

As the Banner data demonstrate, the work-study students spent time either working on
campus, studying, going to tutoring, or getting involved in other collegiate activities. The
majority of the participants in this study spent a significantly higher amount of time at their work
location when compared with the time spent in the classroom. However, a notable difference
between participants is that Serenity in her 4th semester worked fewer hours than she spent in the
classroom. Similarly, Roxy in her second semester worked fewer hours than she spent in the
classroom. In both cases, the difference between class-attended hours and worked hours was
minimal. Sophie was the participant with the fewest semesters worked while Cecilia worked the
most consecutive semesters (See Table 3, Appendix F).
With these data in hand, the researcher during the interview process asked the participants to describe what a normal workday was like for them. This type of broad question was intended to explore among other things the participants’ sense making about the amount of time spent at the college. The interview data show mixed results. While Roxy, Serenity, and Josh did not speak directly about how their time was distributed daily, Sophie, Cecilia, and Altagracia provided detailed accounts of how they made sense of their college experience. They went on to describe how they spent most of their time and how that experience influenced them to re-enroll.

Roxy was aware that she had worked between classes but did not refer to spending more time in one place or the other. This finding is interesting because Roxy was the participant who worked the greatest number of hours. This fact could mean that for her the time spent at work was not burdensome in light of the benefits she was getting from it.

Serenity focused on explaining how hectic her schedule had been from the moment of getting her kids ready to go to school to when she was in the college and then back home to start all over again. She did not elaborate on the amount of time spent at either place. Perhaps Serenity’s concerns were more tied to raising her family and, as she stated, “making ends meet.” Likewise, Josh described tasks he had performed related to his work but did not talk about going to classes and describing where he spent his time. However, as Josh stated, he was involved in college clubs and other activities. For him, the more he worked, the more he was able to stay on campus and get involved in many other collegiate activities.

Sophie, Cecilia, and Altagracia differed from the previous three participants in explaining in detail what they believed were the benefits of being able to work on campus. They thought it had helped them work with their busy schedules and manage their time. These participants were aware of where they thought they were spending significant amounts of time.
Altagracia knew how she was spending her time around campus. After describing how she had received the opportunity to participate in the work-study program, she stated,

I spent I guess most of the time there in the office, but I did because I studied there as well. It allowed me the opportunity to both work and get my study done. I do participate in all of the work-study sessions throughout the year, which are fall, spring, winter, and two sessions of summer. During the intersessions of winter and summer I and summer II, we worked a significant amount of hours. In my case, I did not take classes during the intersessions and focused on getting work experience. I really enjoyed the time I spend with the supervisors. There is always a lot of things to do.

Sophie reported a similar situation. However, when assessing her experience, she compared her early days in college with how things were at the time of the interview:

At the beginning of my associate’s program, I worked outside-off campus, so my time in college was limited. I spent many hours studying late nights and weekends at home. Once I was not working outside and started working on campus, it gave me the opportunity to spend more time in [sic] the college grounds. Generally, I spent a lot of time during the work-study sessions in my designated office. I rarely met with faculty, perhaps two times per semester. The rest of my time was in the work-study office, studying at the library, and being involved when I could in other campus activities.

Cecilia was more explicit. She described her experience from the time she started to get ready at home to the time she arrived at the college. She was the first person on campus that visitors saw, since she provided information about the college. In trying to make sense of her time spent on campus, she stated,
First, I do my job in the office. Then I go to the classrooms and take a class or two. I am in the college for a good five hours daily. Of those, at least three are dedicated to work. This is like a second home for me. I work the whole year and through the intersessions. So basically I work five sessions of work-study. I consider that I dedicate more time at my work location than at classes. When I have free time, I spend it in other college activities such as presentations, etc.

Altagracia and Cecilia understood that the time spent in the work-study designated location was a factor in their success in creating a schedule that helped them manage the time spent at the college but also the time they needed to take care of their families. The other participants by contrast had focused on other priorities instead of how they managed their time.

In summary, the participants dedicated significant amount of time at their work-study locations. Three of the interviewees attributed learning to manage their time as it was an important factor in the interviewees’ aspirations to succeed. The other three participants although they did not comment of spending more time at any location, Banner data demonstrate they spent significant higher amount of time at their work locations than in classes. Perhaps this three participants were more focused on the benefits they were obtaining from being a work-study students that time was not relevant to them. For example, the convenience of being working in the same college they were attending.

Convenience

In assessing and making sense of the college environment, their professional development and the work-study program, all six participants expressed that working on campus offered benefits and convenience. The most common themes mentioned were flexibility of schedule, convenience of going to work, going to classes and later returning to work, the
elimination of the need to commute from outside jobs to college, and the professional benefits they obtained from being in their specific work location. These included getting recommendation letters, obtaining help when writing a cover letter and resumes, having access to information about jobs in and outside of the college, and obtaining valuable academic information that helped them register for future courses.

Serenity reflected on how working on campus was convenient for her: “It is a great experience where you have the opportunity to work and then go to classes.” In describing this advantage she continued by stating that “it benefited me significantly because it helped me get to the classes on time. There is a Career Development Office, and being working on campus allowed me—during breaks—to go and look for job opportunities.”

Sophie and Cecilia shared how working on campus was different from previous jobs they had held outside. According to Cecilia, “now that I work on-campus, I have no need to commute to an outside job.” Sophie compared how working with a house-cleaning service had differed from working on campus: “the campus work meant a change of everything. In addition to having work-location convenience, it helped me preparing myself for a real job.”

Josh saw working on campus as “the perfect networking atmosphere where you are always learning different things from different peoples. It was really good to be there.” Roxy interpreted her experience similar to Josh:

Working on campus was a positive and motivational experience. I was able to have a flexible schedule and meet a lot of people, which always encouraged me. I benefited from learning management skills that will continue benefiting me in the future. Everything worked out in my benefit; the supervisor allowed me time to study if needed. The
convenience of school/work in the same location was great, and so was the staff and the payment I received for my worked hours.

In conclusion, the participants felt that working on campus provided them the convenience they needed to navigate between school, work and personal life, eliminating the stress of commuting from outside jobs to college. They also sensed that working on campus provided them the opportunity to expand their job search and professional growth. Academically, they felt that interacting with other students gave them the advantage to enroll for classes with specific faculty as recommended by peers. The convenience that the work-study provided them, served as a learning tool to manage and prioritize their time.

**Learned to Prioritize their Time**

The time spent at the office was only one of the nested themes some of the participants believed helped them persist in college. Data findings show that different from the other three students, those who were raising a family (Serenity, Roxy, and Sophie) were more conscious and expressive in describing how they sensed they had managed and prioritized their time. Roxy in particular was aware of time management, but, as described above, she couldn’t articulate where she believed she had spent most of her time while in college. A marked difference between participants’ cases is that Josh, Altagracia, and Cecilia did not specify having to prioritize their time, although when they answered other questions, it seems as if they had busy schedules as well. Perhaps for them time management and prioritizing off campus were not as important as it was prioritizing time on campus. Thus, it can be concluded that the interviewees considered prioritizing their time helped them deal with the stress of having a hectic schedules.

Serenity described how she would manage her time from when she got up in the morning until she went to classes and reported for work:
I think I managed my time very well. The truth is, it wasn’t that simple or easy, but I managed. I started by taking my kids to school, then went to take a class, then went to my work location and worked a couple of hours. Then I went back to take another class to later return to my work location. Lastly, I went and picked up my kids from school and finally went home. What I did is I got organized. It was a matter of having a routine that the whole family was able to follow and not making changes to the schedule. The whole process was practically another job. One needs to . . . you have to manage your time and set your schedule. Otherwise, I couldn’t do it.

In describing her time-management experience, Roxy felt she had managed college and work very well and had emphasized prioritizing:

I worked between classes, which was very convenient. Most of the time I set my schedule for the days I had fewer classes so that I had plenty of time to manage work/school. Time management is such a powerful tool that I used to accomplish all the required tasks. Having a set schedule allowed me to get my work done at a set time and make time for personal life and raising my family. Prioritizing is a necessity. Overall, I think I did a very good job staying on time with all my assignments and work tasks through good time management.

Sophie associated her time management in terms of how she could provide for her family while working and attending school:

The financial stress was always there. It is not that I thought I couldn’t do it, but it was more like how can I make enough money to pay my bills and provide for my family. You have to organize yourself to make ends meet. You definitely have to set priorities and have a fixed schedule.
In summary, the general consensus and understanding from Serenity, Roxy, and Sophie was that when raising a family, going to college, and working, one has to gain the skill to prioritize one’s time and determine which goals were more important and deciding which activities were eliminated and postponed. From their accounts it was clear that they understood that without being organized and having a fixed schedule, they would not have been able to attend college.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to explore how work-study students make sense of their lived experiences of persisting at a community college in the U.S. Northeast. Once interview data were analyzed, four superordinate themes and ten nested sub-themes were found. As a group, these themes provide an understanding of the meaning the participants of the work-study program gave to the experience of persisting in college.

The first theme identified the importance for the study participants to learn to cope with different types of stress associated with life, study, and aspects of the academic environment. It was evident that to the participants the development of meaningful, supportive relationships with supervisors, peer workers, faculty, and members of the collegiate community influenced their decision to persist. The students expressed experiencing significant motivational non-academic support from supervisors and from all members of the college, especially when the students were dealing with stressful issues. Faculty advising, the Tutoring Center, and peer-workers’ academic advice were also found to influence the participants’ class selections and enrollment decisions but not as meaningfully as non-academic support.

Once the participants developed these meaningful relationships, they started discovering coping mechanisms that helped them deal with stress. This study found that the interviewees faced stressors like traumatic loss of family and friends, ill family members, financial stress,
academic stress, and winter-seasonal depression. As the students dealt with trauma related to the loss of family and friends, they sought emotional support from supervisors and peer workers. They also adjusted their schedule and in some cases dropped some classes to ease their academic burden. In several cases they utilized going to work as a refuge to distance themselves from stressful issues. In one instance, music therapy was used to alleviate stress. Financial stress was managed by the support of the work-study program and other types of financial aid. Some of the participants also referred to attending the Tutoring Center when facing academic stress.

While the participants developed supportive relationships and learned to develop mechanism that helped them cope with stress, it was evident that in part they were positively influenced by the college’s engaging and welcoming environment. They attributed it to their being able to allocate extra time because they were already working on campus. The students welcomed the opportunity to socialize and get involved in college activities and clubs. As a result, they developed other beneficial relationships with fellow students and made connections across campus which helped them network and obtain information about jobs, receive job referrals and acquire new professional skills. A significant finding was that all the interviewees mentioned feeling welcomed from the moment they started working on campus by the college’s multicultural population. They also felt as if their college workplace had become their second home, that they were valued, felt comfortable, and belonged to what Josh called “something,” referring to the college community. All six participants conveyed that as part of the working environment, working on campus was convenient for them as they studied for their degrees. Working on campus offered flexible schedules, the elimination of commuting between outside jobs and college, doing professional networking with campus constituents, allowed them to study
when the office work was minimal and, as Roxy described it, having “a positive and motivational experience.”

As part of working on campus in a positive and welcoming environment, the participants of this study perceived that their personal and professional identities were developing. As a group, they all reported changing from feeling lost, “having no clue,” and being shy individuals to becoming more extroverted, self-confident, and secure persons. They perceived that working had helped them acquire new office and professional skills that would help them in future. Most importantly, as Sophie stated, they felt more accountable and responsible for everything they did, including their education. In part, this successful change was attributed to having set academic goals, with the expectation of finishing their degrees. Some of the participants believed that this opportunity of attending college was their last chance (Cecilia, Altagracia, and Serenity). They were aware that if they decided to stay home, they were not going to have the will to return to college, so getting their degree was a must.

The last finding of the participants’ accounts revealed the acquired management skills impacted how they were able to re-enroll in college and perform as they expected. It was found that the participants spent the great majority of their college time working on campus. This information, acquired from the college database was corroborated by some of the participants. An interesting finding was that when participants were worried about family and financial issues, they were more conscious of how they managed their time. More specifically, they cared about creating a balanced schedule by carefully prioritizing. Those participants who did more socializing on campus and had a study-related mindset were focused on accomplishing tasks while at work but did not measure nor mention where they had spent most of their time. Perhaps
these participants were satisfied with the opportunities that became available through the work-study program.

Chapter V: Discussion and Recommendations for Practice

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how work-study students make sense of their lived experiences of persisting at a community college in the U.S. Northeast. Qualitative research was determined by the researcher as the best tool to explore deeply the work-study students’ sense making of their experience of persistence. The method that was the best fit for this type of qualitative research was an interpretative phenomenological analysis because of its psychological emphasis in the search for meaning and sense making; its focus on the particular to understand the whole experience; and the continuous iteration between the researcher and the students’ accounts. This study’s focus was on psychological resiliency rather than cognitive academic learning. Given that a resilient individual adapts and maintain mental health despite experiencing adversity (Herman, Stewart, Diaz-Granados, Berger, Jackson, & Yuen, 2001), the construct of resilience was utilized by the researcher as the main lens through which to explore the participants’ sense making of their experiences. After an in-depth analysis of the interview data, four superordinate themes emerged: (1) coping with stress, (2) encountering engaging and welcoming environments, (3) developing personal and professional identities, and (4) acquiring time-management skills.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, findings pertaining to each superordinate theme are discussed and situated within the current literature. Second, an overall conclusion is presented. Third, recommendations for practice are presented, each emphasizing a superordinate theme and/or a nested theme, the work-study program students’ participation and their persistence. Furthermore, various examples that could be used in practice are presented. In this
regard, the researcher presents suggestions for ways the work-study program could be expanded to benefit a larger number of participants. Lastly, this chapter presents recommendations for future research.

**Coping with Stress**

This study found that the participants’ resilience in adapting to adversity was carried out through different strategies: first, developing supportive relationships; secondly, dropping one class to gain the extra time to deal with family issues while being able to complete required school work; thirdly, seeking out academic tutoring; fourthly, acquiring financial aid and a work-study job to deal with financial stress; fifthly, quitting outside jobs to concentrate on college; and lastly, using work-study as a way to ease dealing with life and college-related stress.

For adult work-study students, enrolling in higher education presents various challenges. While many of them have been out of school for many years, reintegrating into academia and collegiate processes could cause significant stress. As adult students, they also have other responsibilities: they need to provide for a family which requires them to work in order to pay their living expenses. Thus, financial concerns represent another stressing factor for them. This group of students also faces the stresses associated with family and life. Having an ill child, parent, or other family member can be traumatic for students. Despite these challenges, many of them decided to pursue a college, something which resulted in their becoming persisting, resilient individuals, that is, those who use personal and community protective factors which help them develop coping mechanisms to facilitate adapting to and dealing with stress while at the same time persisting in college. Therefore, for this particular study, the resilience construct provides the appropriate lens to analyze work-study students’ experiences of persistence.
Herman et al., (2011) defined a resilient individual as one who maintains a positive attitude and adapts when facing adversity. Theron and Theron (2010) suggested that resilience includes the individual protective factors of family, parents, extended friends but also such community protective factors as mentoring adults, the opportunities generated from involvement in extracurricular activities with peers, and access to a good college.

In fact, developing supportive relationships was in this study the most important coping mechanism found to help participants cope with stressing factors and hence persist in college. This finding is consistent with the robust literature that exists which previously found that social support is a key determinant in people’s resilience (Benard, 1995; Bernard, 2004; Flake, Davis, Johnson & Middleton, 2009; Orthner & Rose, 2009; Plough, Fielding, Chandra, Williams, Eisenman, Wells, Fogleman, & Magaña, 2013; Sek, 1991; Wilks & Spivey, 2010; Zaleski, Levey-Thors, & Schaffino 1998). Similarly, literature in persistence also confirms this finding by associating external factors like family influence and peer support with persistence; e.g. in this study, the encouragement the work-study students received from peer workers, their employment status, and their intention and desire to continue attending college (Bean, 2003; Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey & Jenkins, 2007).

As the work-study students developed formal and informal connections throughout college, they acquired what Bowen and Martin (2011) in their resilience studies referred to as the “guardrails of life.” These guardrails emerged from the support from family, friends, supervisors and peer work-study students. The end result was that these students were able to maintain a balance between family and life. Work-study involvement also allowed the participants to develop a mentoring relationship with their supervisors and in some instances with faculty members. These trustworthy relationships are found to be important for creating resilient
individuals (Bernard, 2004). These support-related findings are in agreement with prior studies; e.g. students who were mentored developed not only academically but in other non-cognitive personal aspects and as a result became resilient individuals (Huisman, Robb Singer, & Catapano, 2010; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). Terenzini and Reason’s (2005) findings are also consistent with those of this study as they associated the students’ academic success with the quality of their supportive and mentoring relations with faculty and staff.

This study also found that three participants went through traumatic events: death of a mother, death of a college’s friend, and having a father severely ill with Alzheimer. Yet despite these circumstances, they persisted. This finding supports prior resilience research linking life trauma with the resilience of individuals. Bonanno (2005) found that despite traumatic events (e.g., the death of family or a close friend), resilient adult individuals can develop the capacity to function normally. Bonanno (2005) also discovered that resilience occurs primarily in adult populations and depends on the length of the trauma as well as the individual’s ability to adapt and control their emotions. Chaskin (2008) found that such individuals developed positive preventive strategies to cope with traumatic life events. In this study, the participants sought the support of their supervisor and peer workers. As mentioned earlier, they also adjusted their class schedule by removing one class to be able to pass the others. Finally, some utilized work-study as a way to isolate life events temporarily. Bowen and Martin (2011) referred to this type of coping strategy when describing the Road of Life’s individual assets, which in this case provided the work-study students with the strength needed to negotiate stress. For the work-study students, the specific road of life included their home life, academic work and career aspirations (Bowen & Martin, 2011). When the participants’ experiences were analyzed in terms of Bowen and Martin’s (2011) five dimensions of individual assets, four were found to be applicable to the
participants of this study. They were, first, the cognitive dimension, whereby the participants stayed on track despite collegiate and life challenges and negative experiences; secondly, the social dimension, in which they developed the capacity to seek support from supervisors, peer workers and in some cases faculty and other college personnel; thirdly, the emotional dimension, whereby Josh and Cecilia looked forward to the next day of work as a way to isolate stressors; and lastly, the spiritual dimension, with Altagracia, for example, drawing personal strength from her spiritual beliefs (Bowen & Martin, 2011). A fifth dimension described by Bowen and Marin was the physical dimension, although in this study the participants did not describe how they maintained their physical health or whether they exercised regularly.

This study was conducted in a community college, where the literature indicates that students are usually non-traditional, mostly females, and preponderantly individuals from low-income backgrounds with financial need (Fike & Fike, 2008; Settle, 2010; Sorey & Duggan, 2008). Four of the six participants explicitly declared that financial stress was a concern, although they relegated this type of stress as less important given the support they had received from others. The work-study program and other sources of financial aid were thus found to have had a positive influence on their decision to persist in college. Hence, these findings are in agreement with the existing literature which indicates that financial aid has a positive impact on students’ persistence (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora & Hengstler, 1992; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Gross, Hossler & Ziskin, 2007; Hillman, 2010; Scott-Clayton, 2011; Settle, 2010; Tinto, 1987). This finding is also in line with those researchers who concluded that work-study in particular was impactful on students’ persistence (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007; Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1987; Somers, 1996).
The last mechanism found in this study for coping with stress was academic tutoring together with any staff support the participants sensed as helpful. Three of the interviewees expressed having received some kind of helpful academic tutoring as well as academic support at their work-study locations. The latter came from staff and peer workers, a supportive intervention not mentioned in the literature. This finding is nevertheless consistent with similar research conducted specifically with faculty. For example, Terenzini and Reason (2005) found that the adult learners’ academic success was linked to the interrelated roles of various actors from both the student body and the faculty. In this study in particular, the helpful support persons were students, fellow workers, and staff. The literature has consistently linked persistence among community-college students with the developmental education and support received by them (Crisp & Nora; Fike & Fike, 2008; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Sorey & Duggan, 2006; Torres, 2006). Hence, as these three work-study students sought out tutoring and academic support from among staff and peer workers, they were increasing their opportunities to be successful.

Coping with stress—one of the superordinate themes of this study—is significant for helping one understand the experiences of persistence of work-study community-college students at this particular location. The different mechanisms the students developed to cope with stress while strengthening their resilience offer important implications for practice. While working on campus, work-study students depend on personal and community protective factors which include formal and informal supportive relationships with staff, peer workers and the collegiate community that help them deal with life in general as well as collegiate stress. As they maneuvered through college, the work-study students utilized this program and other forms of financial aid to ease the financial stress associated with their particular situations. Lastly, when they felt the need, they sought academic support at both the tutoring center and their work
location. This finding offers the work-study administrators guidance in allocating program funds to students. Adult learners, first-generation and at-risk students obviously benefit from the support provided by the informal and formal relationships available through the program. The strengthening of these protective factors could thus help work-study students create similar coping mechanism that could result in their persisting in college. In practice, these findings suggest that to help adult’s students to cope with stress, the college should offer workshops that focus on how to: manage traumatic situations, seek professional support, have self-control of emotions, and how to effectively isolate and manage stress. A good intervention practice should include the college’s early alert system in which a faculty member who identifies a student under stress, or in the case that the student have volunteered information about being in a stressing situation, could refer them to see a counselor.

Supportive relationships to be sure were not the only influencing factors found in this study. This student population was also sensitive to and affected by the larger community and environment surrounding them. This latter topic is discussed next.

**Engaging and Welcoming Environments**

This study found that the participants examined tended to persist when they considered the collegiate environment welcoming. This finding is in agreement with the current literature. A link was found between student resilience and their feeling of studying in a safe environment (Barbarain, Richter, & De Wet, 2000) where they were able to use personal, social and environment resources to adapt (Chaskin, 2008). Likewise, other scholars studying persistence linked environmental factors with students’ persistence (Castaneda et al., 1993; Spady, 1971; Williams & Bryan, 2013). Castaneda et al. (1993) and Spady (1971) meantime found that a positive learning environment linked with social integration had positive effects on student
persistence. Williams and Bryan (2013) found similar results when examining African American academic success. Tinto (1997) and Braxton (2008) posited that an environment that encourages students’ engagement is a key factor in their persistence and satisfaction. Bean and Metzner (1985) found that a supportive environment made up for the students’ weak academic support. A positive environment promotes among other things the students’ socialization on campus and college integration as well as their feeling of belonging to an inclusive multicultural collegial campus.

In describing the college community as part of the protective framework of an individual student’s resilience, Chaskin (2008) referred to it as a functional unit where connections are temporal and maintains a direct link to a function, use, or personal investment. This network of relationships therefore can be used as an instrument to get access to information, opportunity, and resources extending beyond an individual’s own networks (Chaskin, 2008); but it can also be used to “buffer the effect of adversity and enable development to proceed” (Benard, 2007, p. 4). Kulm and Cramer (2006), who found that working on campus provided opportunities to network and socialize with peers and faculty, linked this support to persistence. This study found that the students were able to socialize and get involved in other campus activities. The majority of the participants stated that they had socialized with others while on campus, while four mentioned some sort of campus involvement and engagement. The findings of this study support the literature that links students’ college socialization and institutional engagement with their persistence (Barbatis, 2010; Miller, 2006; Nora & Wedham, 1991; Pascarella et al., 1996; Tinto, 1975). More specifically, it was found in the literature that working on campus enhanced the students’ social life and overall integration (Carroll, Choy, & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Curtis, 2007; Domene, Socholotiuk, & Woitowicz, 1998; Tinto, 1993).
One of the main criticisms of current social-integration frameworks was that this research was conducted at four-year research institutions and did not look at community-college students, and most specifically, at racial/ethnic minority students who comprise the majority at this study’s location (Cox & Ebbers, 2010; Torres, 2006). In this regard, Kraemer (1997) argued that racial/ethnic minority students have to go through the process of adaptation and exposure to a new set of norms and expectations before they can become successful academically. This study is in agreement with Kraemer’s findings and differs from studies that have criticized Tinto’s research. Although the current study was conducted in a two-year community college, it was found that social integration was part of the minority students being able to developing a sense of belonging and adapting to what they felt was a welcoming environment. Hence, this finding is in agreement with Tinto’s (1988) social-integration model, which posited that when students are active and engaged in different campus organizations, they are more likely to persist than others who do not get involved. This finding is significant because it helps bridge the gap in the literature regarding the application of the social-integration model to community colleges and thereby opens the door for other community colleges to make use of it.

Another important finding was that for the participants of this study, the work-study program and the college’s environment provided an opportunity which they utilized to get involved and belong to other college groups; as a result, they extended their time on campus and were eventually able to complete their degree programs. The literature suggests that being a member of community organizations positively influences the persistence of students (William & Bryan, 2013). Astin (1994) explained this phenomenon in detail with his theory of student involvement which suggested that on-campus co-curricular activities could result in student persistence. Tinto (1975) correlated students’ retention and departure with the level of their
community integration; especially when it came from participation in collegiate organizations, among them, work-study groups (McCormick, Moore, & Kuh, 2010).

Furthermore, these findings are consistent with the research on human psychological resiliency which associated it with safe environments, people’s socialization and networking with resilient individuals (Barbarain, Richter, & De Wet, 2000; Chaskin, 2008). This particular finding is significant because it can be concluded that the college environment, students’ socialization and involvement influenced their persistence. These conclusions suggest that additional students should be allowed to participate in work-study programs to benefit from this type of socialization and campus involvement. Moreover, community colleges should consider strengthening their environment in ways that encourage diversity while making sure that students feel they belong and are welcomed.

Belonging and inclusiveness comprised an important sub-theme in this study. The participants stressed the importance of feeling welcomed and finding multicultural diversity on campus. In this regard, when viewed through the lens of resilience, Chaskin (2008) posited that community becomes a central effective unit in creating a sense of belonging as students establish a network of connections. This finding is in agreement with those of Belgrave, Chase-Vaughn, Gray, Dixon Addison, and Cherry (2000), which found that positive feelings about oneself, one’s culture, and one’s ethic group was a determining factor that increased the resilience of individuals. They also found that interventions related to ethnicity and culture had positive effects on African American students. Thus, the participants of the work-study program felt their job location became a place where they could network, and as a consequence their self-confidence increased as well as their resiliency.
This finding is also in agreement with those of the persistence models. For example, Tinto’s (1987, 1993) model of student persistence helps one understand the work-study students’ feelings of belonging found in the present research. According to Tinto, those students who do not feel they belong will not be integrated into the collegiate community and are most likely to depart. Pascarella, Terenzini, and Hibel (1978) likewise found that students’ social and interpersonal environments were key contributors to their persistence. Overall, it was implicit that having a sense of belonging academically and socially were key indicators for student persistence. In this particular study, the work-study students by engaging in different campus activities developed their sense of belonging at the college and contributed to their considering it a welcoming environment.

In general, this study found that the positive and welcoming environment they encountered influenced their persistence. As the students sensed the campus environment was multicultural and inclusive, they came to feel that they belonged, gained increased self-confidence and became more engaged both academically and in non-academic activities. This socialization-and-engagement process enabled them to build on personal beneficial relationships that helped them minimize the effects of stress and become integrated into campus life. The implications of these findings provide administrators with guidance for maintaining a welcoming environment, one of inclusion, by acknowledging the benefits of and adding to multiculturalism in the college curriculum in ways that enable all students to feel connected. A current practice the college should improve is the expansion of multinational flags display to include representation of all Students’ countries. Through these artifacts, once the students see their respective country’s flag, they could sense a welcoming environment and develop feelings of belonging. Similarly, the college should celebrate and recognize multicultural important days.
through culture and music. For example, having music presentations at the auditorium that represents the cultures and backgrounds of the students. To this end, not only work-study students, but the multiple students’ clubs and college’s association should be required active participation in the organization of this type of event which promotes socialization and positive learning environments.

Once the participants of this study felt the college’s environment was welcoming and one in which they belonged, they continued developing their personal and professional identities. Next, a deeper connection is presented between this particular finding and what the literature offers in terms of individual students’ identities and role performance.

**Developing Personal and Professional Identity**

In agreement with previous research, this study found that as the work-study students became involved in different college jobs and activities, they assumed new roles which helped build their self-confidence. For example, Zimmerman-Oster & Bukardt (1999) found that working as members of the group at their respective offices increased student self-confidence and self-esteem. Likewise, as the students took onto new leadership roles, their self-confidence increased (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). These newly acquired roles allowed them to assign meaning to their actions (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). This process also enabled them to develop their identities and create feelings of belonging within the college. As these students had different personal and collegiate challenges which they were increasingly able to resolve, they developed emotional and social skills that allowed them to construct new identities (Erikson, 1963). In this study, as the participants learned new processes, first they became more extroverted; second, they assigned new meaning to what being a work-study student meant; and third, they learned as a result of interacting with others (Mead, 1934).
other words, the work-study students started learning from others as they interacted with them. Their actions acquired new meaning as they received approval from peer workers (Mead, 1934) and as they made sense of their world through learning and discovery (Erickson, 1963).

Chaskin in his research on resilient individuals discussed a connection between individuals and community which helps one understand the work-study students’ role identities. For example, Chaskin (2008) described community as a central part of developing an individual’s identity through creating a sense of belonging. Personal identity is formed by the interconnection of individual qualities and protective factors like family, social networks, ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status (De Leon, Stefanisko, & Cortesza, 1999) and is defined internally but also externally by others (Deaux, 1993). Masten and Coatsworth’s (1998) psychological framework of development is helpful when used to analyze the findings of this study because it focused on the relationships the participants established from infancy through adulthood, especially at the stage of attending college. They also found that (a) as students self-regulate, they gain control of social behavior which the researchers linked to resilience and (b) the students’ self-regulation fostered social competence, which helped them deal with stress and allowed for self-control, important for the individuals’ identity development and socialization process (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Thus it was apparent that the work-study students examined here developed a sense of belonging which helped in their personality formation and becoming socially competent—characteristics that aided them in dealing with stress and being resilient and thus able to stay in school.

Research in human identity provides an understanding of the experiences of the work-study students’ development. For example, Erikson’s (1963) definition of identity is useful with regard to this study’s findings. He called it “the ability to experience one’s role self as something
that has continuity and sameness, and to act accordingly” (p. 42). When describing one’s psychological role identity, McCall & Simmons (1978) noted that commitment and identity are interrelated. Stryker (1968) and Burke and Tully (1977) defined role identity as how one sees oneself in a role as well as how others attribute roles to an individual. This definition is anchored in two main concepts: first, identity as part of an individual’s social interaction processes (Stryker, 1968; Valsiner & Rosa, 2007). In this case the context is how the work-study students in the present research interacted within the college. Secondly, identity is formed from particular situations which collectively produce the self (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Stryker, 1968); and as the work-study students reflect on their personal positions as compared to new professional roles (Leijen, Lam, Wildschut & Simons, 2009; Leijen, Valtna, Leijen & Pedaste, 2011). In summary, the work-study students’ roles as students, workers, and members of college clubs continued expanding their identity as they attributed meaning to what they were learning and how their work-study supervisor and peer workers regarded them.

As the research participants became involved in the process of learning new work-study and college-related roles, their personal identities expanded. This process also promoted the development of the participants’ professional identities. This finding was the second highest nested theme in this study. The experience and professional socialization that occurred as part of being involved in work-study allowed the participants to feel that they had achieved significant professional growth. When responding to the interview questions, they self-evaluated their identities when they stated that they were developing into more professional individuals.

In this regard, the findings of this study are in agreement with the literature on professional identity. Higgs (1993) considered that professional identity occurs when new work roles stimulate development of attitudes and beliefs creating a new identity as a member of a
group (in this study, the work-study role). Gibson, Dollarhide, and Moss (2010) argued that professional identity involves the individual’s relationship to society and their work-professional group or community; while (Ibarra, Kilduff, and Tsai, 2005) added the individual’s social network. Hunter, Laursen, and Seymour (2007) went on to link identity development with professional socialization in the process of making sense of a particular community practice: for example, as the research participants started making sense of what it meant to be work-study students while attending college. Renninger (2009) added that professional identities are constantly evolving over time through cognitive and affective processes. Paterson et al. (2002) defined professional identity as feeling professional in one’s technical skills, interpretation, professional judgment, reasoning, and self-evaluation and learning. Gibson et al. (2010) added that professional identity includes self-reflection and the locus of one’s change evaluation.

In this study, one of the participants was making sense of her experience and described how she felt she had grown professionally by learning how to dress properly, write professionally and develop such work habits as arriving to work early and developing leadership skills, team work and public-speaking skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Along these lines, Irby (2011) stated that professional identity is developed through acquisition of knowledge and skills related to the profession. De Weerdt, Bouven, Courthous, and Martens (2006) argued that self-reflection becomes an important link between an individual’s experience and identity. Hunter, Laursen, and Seymour (2007) argued that students develop their professional identity when a college or university encourages their participation and engagement—something which helps them take ownership and act professionally. Likewise, another study found that as students worked, they became more confident individuals who were able to improve their academic skills (Lucas & Lammont, 1998).
All participants in this study in reflecting on the individual they had become felt that they had changed and grown more professional as part of the opportunity that the college presented by allowing them to become part of the work-study program. Consequently, as a result of their newly acquired roles and evolving identities, they were reflecting on the meaning these changes were having with regard to their aspirations for completing their degrees. This study found that all six participants expressed the intention of finishing their program. This finding is directly related to the resilience study of Benard (2004), which identified the protective factor in the participants’ acknowledging that it is never too late to change their life trajectories and finish their degrees. The current study’s finding is also consistent with Tinto’s (1993) intention construct. He referred to intention as to having the will to go to college, learn and find the way to be successful, as these work-study students expressed. Other scholars took the construct of intention a step further by linking it to behaviors that would result in persistence (Bean & Easton, 2000). In the present study in particular, the students acknowledged that this was the last opportunity they had to get a degree, and as Cecilia stated, when facing stress, she knew that if she had stayed home instead of going to her work-study job, she would have never returned to college.

It can be concluded that while participating in the work-study program, the interviewees of this study integrated themselves into the collegiate community. As they interacted with the constituents of the community, especially with staff and peers workers at their work locations, they kept developing their personal and professional identities. The participants started finding their identities evolving positively based on the feedback received from the work-study group they belonged to and the meaning they attributed to their experiences. The participants also created new beliefs and attitudes toward the work they performed and the college in general. These, together with learning their new work roles, getting engaged on campus and re-evaluating
themselves helped the students build their professional identities. In consequence, the
participants declared their intention of completing their degrees. Intention to finish a degree, as
stated earlier, was found in the literature to be important for students’ persistence. Intention
proved to have been important in this study also, since the work-study students were clear about
their aspirations: they had planned to complete their degrees, and their resilience was enabling
them to accomplish their goals.

As the work-study students faced new challenges and became involved in different roles,
time management became an important part of what they sensed was professional growth. In
fact, what they were experiencing was the dynamic interaction between their student, parent and
new student-worker roles. This interaction required them to develop time-management skills and
schedule prioritization.

**Acquired Time-Management Skills**

This study found that the majority of the participants had to juggle scheduling personal
time, raising a family, attending college and being a work-study student. They acknowledged
wanting to improve their time-management skills as well as their ability to prioritize their goals,
both abilities which they sensed were key to being successful in college and eliminating college-
related stress. This finding is in agreement with the literature on time management. The
definition of time management provided by the literature is an individual’s cluster of behaviors
aimed at increasing productivity and reducing stress (Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993). Britton and
Glynn (1989) developed a model of time-management with several components: determining
goals and sub-goals, deciding which tasks are needed to be accomplish these goals, and
prioritizing tasks and putting them into a schedule to be carried out. This model helps one
understand the work-study students’ time-management and task-prioritization experiences. For
instance, Cecilia, Roxy, Serenity and Sophie described in details this process from the moment they wake up in the morning, take their kids to school, go to work and classes, pick their kids up from school, go to their children’s sports activities, and start all over the following weekday. They organized their time in ways that they could accomplish each particular goal while still attending classes and hence persisting. This finding is in agreement with research that linked academic success with good time management (Cambell & Svenson, 1992) and having control of time while reducing stress (Misra & McKean, 2000). Likewise, Britton and Tesser (1991) found that in changing and volatile school environments, short-range planning (good time management) was effective in students’ academic achievement.

A second significant finding of this study, perhaps based on the uniqueness of this particular college’s setting, interview data and the college’s Banner database system’s data revealed that the study participants were spending significantly more time at their work location interacting with staff versus attending classes and spending time with faculty members (see Appendix E). The findings of this study are thus in disagreement with those of previous research which claimed that the great majority of time students spent in college was with faculty and/or in the classrooms (Chickering, 2000; Crisp, 2010; Demaris & Kritsonis, 2008; Kim, 2002; Salinitri, 2005; Terrion & Pillion, 2010). However, the results of this study are consistent with the findings of Kulm and Cramer (2005) which found that when students spend more time working on campus, the socialization process and time spent beyond classes helped them persist; and with those of Astin (1996), which associated the students’ time spent in campus involvement with persistence. These latter two pieces of research suggest that working and socializing by the participants of the current study had a positive impact on them. Therefore time-management and goal prioritization turned out to be a must. While the participants dedicated a number of hours to
work, they managed their time in a way that allowed them not only to attend classes, but also to be involved in and integrate other campus activities into their lives.

Previous literature showed mixed results in terms of hours worked and persistence. Wang, Kong, Shan, and Kuan Vong (2010) suggested that new research on work-study should be done to consider the work intensity, the work performed and the reasons the students had to accept their jobs. In this context, studies by Curtis (2007) found that working fewer hours (no more than 10 to 12 per week) had a positive impact on student persistence. Conversely, Furr and Elling (2000) found that working over 20 hours negatively affected student persistence. This study’s findings are heterogeneous. That is, no difference was found in terms of the hours the interviewees worked. All six participants persisted regardless of how much worked. Roxy for example worked 493 hours during her first semester, reduced the hours during her second semester, increased hours to 475 during her third semester and yet persisted. Conversely, Serenity worked 65 hours during her fourth semester after she had worked over 300 hours during previous semesters, showing variable worked hours, and also persisted. This study found no negative influence between the student’s amount of hours worked and the students’ persistence. All participants persisted. This outcome could suggest that when students spend a moderate amount of time at their work locations, the more integrated and engaged they become on campus. In any case, they were able to build and establish supportive relationships, network, and manage and prioritize their time while they juggled being a parent with being a student and a worker.

Time spent at the work location was found to provide the participants with different types of benefits. This study found that the participants considered the work-study program and its location convenient. First, the job was right on campus, which helped with socialization. As
previously discussed, socialization and developing supportive relationships have been found to positively impact students’ resiliency (Benard, 1995; Bernard, 2004; Flake, Davis, Johnson & Middleton, 2009; Orthner & Rose, 2009; Plough et al., 2013; Sek, 1991; Wilks & Spivey, 2010; Zaleski, Levey-Thors, & Schaffino, 1998); and building supportive networks, joining college groups or either by acquiring resources and tips for surviving inside and outside the college (Cox & Ebbers, 2010).

Secondly, the participants also expressed that work-study offered them the opportunity for professional growth by acquiring important job-transferable skills while at school. Moreover, they could visit the career center during work breaks or as allowed by supervisors and interact with the staff there while inquiring about job possibilities. They also reported that peer workers referred them to potential jobs. Consistent with the literature, this finding is in agreement with those of Astin (1999) and his student-developmental theory that linked college experiences with the acquisition of abilities and social experience. Previous studies also associated students who had experienced different roles to personal and professional identity development (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Chaskin, 2008; Erikson, 1963; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Mead, 1934; Zimmerman et al., 1999). These findings mirror those of previous research which found that while working on campus in jobs related to the students’ major, they developed career skills and the likelihood of finding related jobs after graduation (Dimitrios & Karaliopoulou, 2005; McInnis & Hartely, 2002; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005), a likelihood which made their college experience more meaningful for them (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007).

Lastly, the participants agreed that the work-study program offered them the convenience of an easier “commute” from their work location to classes than they would have had were they working off-campus. In agreement with the literature, this finding is important because previous
research found a link between being a commuter student, working off-campus and lower levels of persistence (Cox & Ebbers, 2010; Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1987; Laura, 2010). Hence, the present research helps fill a gap in the literature because as the participants’ commute from work to classes, such commute was reduced by working on campus, therefore the students’ chances for persisting increased.

It was surprising to find that the students’ additional time on campus owing to their work-study responsibilities was significantly higher than the time they spent in the classroom. Their accounts revealed that this was in fact the case. In terms of percentages, the amount of hours spent working was 100% more than that spent in the classroom for four of the participants and 70% more in the case of other two participants. Their time spent on the job was devoted to working, interacting with staff and peer workers and in some cases, studying while at work. This finding reduces the gap in the current literature that previous to this research focused primarily on students’ interactions with faculty in the classroom.

The importance of this finding is that as the students spent more time on campus, they engaged and socialized more and learned how to wisely manage their time and prioritize their schedule to respond to the needs of their multiple roles (as student, workers and parents). The extra time on campus strengthened their resiliency as they solidified their personal and community protective factors. Consistent with previous literature findings, it is recommended that work-study students spend a moderate number of hours throughout the year on campus (Curtis, 2007). Lastly, while working on campus, the students reported gaining time by not having to commute elsewhere to work. They found they had more time to socialize, network on campus, acquire job-transferable skills, and enjoy the convenience of short trips between their on-campus work location, classes and other collegiate endeavors. The theme *acquired time-*
management skills for the educational community, finally, is that it reaffirms previous research theories of student’s socialization and integration in relation to their persistence.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how work-study students make sense of their lived experiences of persisting at a community college in the U.S. Northeast. The broad research question that guided this study was—*How do work-study students understand the experiences that influence their decision to persist at a community college?*

In answering the research question, it was found in accordance with the relevant literature that these work-study students’ experiences of persistence were related to four main themes: the ways they cope with stress, the college’s welcoming environment, their development of personal and professional identities, and their acquisition of time-management skills. In all, supportive relationships, college socialization, professional growth, time management, and gaining self-confidence were found to be important in the participants’ resiliency and persistence.

This group of adult students had different simultaneous roles (parent, student, and worker), and these roles exposed them to different type of stress. Since they were working in what they perceived as a welcoming environment, they spent more time at their work location and elsewhere on campus. The extra time spent on campus allowed that supportive relationships straighten their personal and community protective factors, thereby resulting in greater resiliency for them. In responding to Crisp and Nora’s call (2009) for additional studies related to time spent at work and student persistence, this study has findings with significant implications for higher education. The time spent on-campus work by the students facilitated successful semester completions (persistence), college integration and involvement (socialization), and professional
and personal identities development (growth). This impact suggest that to improve campus persistence among the adult population of this particular community college, similar opportunities should be provided to more students. Previous work-study student-persistence research was conducted at four-year institutions. By contrast, community-college research in this regard was sparse. From that perspective, the findings of this study help bridge the gap in the literature and can provide guidance to college administrators, legislators and constituents whose desired goal is to maintain the highest levels of student retention. This study’s findings nevertheless deal with only a few of the factors that influence adult students’ persistence patterns. Additional research to improve retention among this population is thus warranted.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The participants in this study were exposed to significant stress. As they participated of the work-study program, they learned to develop coping mechanisms that help them succeed in school. The most notable finding was the developing of supportive relationships where they received mentorship from supervisors and peers at their work site that helped them feel connected to the college. This finding suggest that other community colleges should focus on developing greater campus engagement in their students. This study found that because the participants were part of a campus-based work-study program, they utilized their work location as hubs where they manipulate their schedules to comply with the needs of work, academics and college involvement. Although work-study funds are not necessarily enough to cover all students, the implication for practice is that college administrators and faculty should find alternative ways to help students to engage more on campus to have a quicker “commute” to classes. In this regard, community-college administrators should encourage students’ active
As found in this study, the work-study provided students with the convenience that helped them when managing the time and college schedules. This finding has obvious implications for practice. Opportunities of this type of program and other similar ones like college clubs and organizations that require students’ involvement should be expanded. Specifically, this study found that participation in a community college’s work-study program helped non-traditional students develop personal and professional identities. This finding also suggests that institutions should look for alternative ways of funding work-study opportunities. For example, in the short-term, the college might use a small percentage of its discount funds to expand opportunities for students to participate in the work-study program. The college should also expand its local student labor budget to allow for broader participation. In the long-term, administrators should be more involved in lobbying state officials for the re-establishment of the state work-study program through acquainting legislators with the benefits of the program to the community at large. Other long term goals should be: (a) conducting research to explore available federal and state grants that might be used as alternative ways of funding student work and (b) attracting grant support and donors.

The participants were very careful to state that working in the right location was a positive influence that helped them to succeed. This finding suggest that if work-study participants feel connected and sense that the college’s environment is welcoming, the job location and the socialization process they are involved in could provide enough connectivity for them to stay on campus and complete their degree programs. In terms of resiliency, the fact that the work-study’s location offered the student workers a community became a central part of
developing their identities and resiliency (Chaskin, 2008). The implications for practice of this finding are that students should be paired with areas of study and work locations where they feel they can connect with both supervisors and peers, that is cultural inclusive, and where they can experience professional growth through their new job roles. College administrators, staff, and faculty should continue assessing the campus environment to make sure it provides a sense of welcoming and openness and to remedy the situation when necessary.

This study found that students could benefit from staff support which includes academic support. A good example would be to pair students in their jobs with their academic majors so that they might develop major-related skills. Similarly, on-campus internships should be explored for majors that the college has space to place students. Examples of such locations would be science labs, the early childhood center and the accounting offices to name only three. In this regard, the participants in this study acknowledged that working on campus help them growth professionally. Conversely, research has found that working off-campus it is less helpful in assuring persistence than working on campus (Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1987). This finding validates the need to focus on campus-based work-study. However, thanks to this college’s location in a mid-major urban area, it is recommended that off-campus part-time jobs be sought as well as cooperative learning opportunities in partnership with nearby businesses where the students’ commute to college would be minimal. The Career Development office could be used to identify these type of opportunities for the students as well as nearby off campus internships initiatives that in addition, could offer graduates secure job opportunities at the end of internships.

This finding however, should be taken cautiously because the current study did not focus on the influence of student’s work-study on their academic performance. There is significant
research that focused on academics, GPA, work-study and persistence which found negative impacts on persistence when students worked more than 15 hours per week per term (Kulm & Cramer, 2006). This outcome suggests that additional studies should focus on finding the reasons for work-study students being affected by the mentioned variables. The current study focused only on those individuals who had successfully completing their semesters thus persisted and who were working an average of 12-15 hours per week throughout the year. The next section discusses other recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the result of this study, future research might be done with students who despite having participated in the work-study program did not persist. Such research would expand the understanding of what other factors influenced these students’ decisions to drop out. It would also provide college administrators with an understanding of the levels of life, personal and community protective factors needed for such students to persist and would also help administrators implement intervention practices that address the needs of these students.

Contrary to most of the prior studies conducted that focused on students and faculty interactions, this study found and added to the literature by its discovery that this group of work-study students spent a significant amount of time interacting with college staff and peer workers. These interactions were beneficial in terms of the students getting academic advice, gaining professional skills, receiving resume building tips, and finding support for dealing with their stresses. A similar qualitative study should be replicated targeting other college groups (honor groups, college associations, and/or student-senate members) that could shed light on the possible transferability of the current study results.
Longitudinal qualitative and quantitative studies utilizing total work-study populations could provide a better understanding of the factors causing some work-study students to persist while others drop out. Interdisciplinary studies that involve both quantitative and qualitative or mixed methods are recommended (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Given that in many colleges, the database store demographic and academic data, future researchers could conduct quantitative studies utilizing the robust information that they contain that is overlooked. In the case of the location of this study, Banner database system provided valuable information about the participants’ hours worked, their time in courses and their demographic data. The research was none the less limited to a small student sample. A multi-community college qualitative study with a larger sample size could provide robust data findings that could be transferable to similar populations.

Quantitative studies that focus on non-cognitive variables are recommended. For example, correlational studies that measure work-study students against other variables such: supporting relationships, professional growth, and self-confidence which were found in this study as important influence factors on students’ resiliency and persistence. Hence, instead of focusing on students’ GPA and cognitive factors, these other variables should be taken into account in future quantitative studies. Finally, a quantitative study that compares total work-study population data at different types of institutions (e.g. public, private, and community colleges) in terms of such non-cognitive variables as race, gender, college environment, total hours in classes, total hours worked, hours spent at the library, staff support, and multiculturalism should be considered.

It was somewhat troublesome to find that despite the large amount of literature read for this doctoral thesis (books, journal articles and other sources), only a few items focused on
studying minorities in community colleges. Much more research is warranted to understand the factors that affect the persistence of this important higher-education population.

The likelihood of working part-time for a community-college adult student is high. As higher education becomes more expensive and financial support transitions from governments to families, students will likely become more dependent on financial aid, and specifically, on work-study program opportunities. It is up to colleges and universities to create a bridge between students, the classroom, college environments, college involvement and their professional development in ways that serve their needs so as to increase persistence to comply with social demands and the needs of the future work force.
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APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER/EMAIL TO STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

[Date of the letter/email]

[Name and address if mailed]

Dear student,

I am currently a doctoral student in higher education administration at Northeastern University. My thesis title is “Exploring Work-Study Students’ Experiences of Persistence at a Northeastern Community College.”

In order to participate in this study, candidates must have worked in the work-study program and have been enrolled during three or more consecutive semesters. As the work-study coordinator for the college, I was able to identify you in the financial-aid database as a participant of the work-study program. Based on the research criteria, you are eligible to be considered for this study. Therefore I would like to invite you to be a participant. I believe your experience and participation in the work-study program could provide significant insight and invaluable information. If you decide to participate, feel free to call me or email me directly care of the contact information provided in this communication. When you contact me, I shall provide you with additional information and set up a first meeting where I can describe the study and answer any questions that you may have.

I would like to interview you three times. The first meeting will be to explain the study, clarify my role as the researcher of the study, and set up other meetings. This meeting will take no more than 20 minutes. The second meeting however will last between an hour and an hour and a half, while the last meeting will be an overview of the interview data that could require additional clarification questions and may take a similar amount of time.

Your privacy is important to me. Therefore, all information gathered as part of this study will be kept strictly confidential. To protect your identity, you will be allowed to select a pseudonym of your preference. Your participation in this study will be voluntary, and you can decide to withdraw at any time. The study does not provide a cash reward. Instead, as a way of thanking you for your participation and time, the researcher will provide you with a gift card for $25 at the end of the third interview.

If you have any questions or wish to request additional information related to this study, please contact me. My contact information is provided below.

Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance.

Respectfully,

José E. Vélez Otero
Doctoral Candidate
Northeastern University, Boston, MA

Phone: Personal number provided here
Email: Personal email provided here
## APPENDIX B

Demographics of Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Participant of Work-Study</th>
<th>Number of Semesters of Continuous Enrollment While in Work-Study (Persisting)</th>
<th>AVG-GPA</th>
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<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Sophie</td>
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<td>Single</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cecilia</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Married</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Five</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW OBSERVATIONS FORM

Participant Pseudonym________________

Site: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________

Interviewer: José E. Vélez Otero

Question #__ Observation: _______________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Question #__ Observation: _______________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Question #__ Observation: _______________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Question #__ Observation: _______________________________________________________

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Question #__ Observation: _______________________________________________________

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Question #__ Observation: _______________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Question #__ Observation: _______________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Question #__ Observation: _______________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Question #__ Observation: _______________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
You are being asked to participate in this research study. To help you make your decision, it is important for you to understand the purpose of the study. Below I shall describe its specifics. Please take time to read the information presented carefully. If you have any questions or you are unclear about anything, please feel free to ask me. Above all, take your time to decide on whether you want to volunteer for this study.

The purpose of this study is to learn about and understand the experiences of persistence of work-study students. Persistence is defined as continuous enrollment without dropping out. In this study, the researcher’s intention is to explore the experiences that have enabled students to continuously enroll in college. The benefit of this study is that you will be allowed to tell your story of persistence while participating in the College’s Work-Study Program. In addition, findings from the study will be shared with the Northeastern University doctoral committee, the participants, and in the professional public through Pro-Quest dissertations, journal articles, educational presentations, and the college site administration in an attempt to improve retention at community colleges. The researcher in this study is José E. Vélez Otero, a doctoral student at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts.

If you decide to participate of the study, you will be interviewed three times: (1) to learn about the study and the researcher’s role (which is not as the work-study coordinator) and to schedule the other two appointments; (2) to collect data from you on your experiences; and (3) to verify all the data collected. During this third and final interview, there will be the possibility of me asking additional follow-up questions. Please be aware that these interviews will be digitally audio-recorded with a backup audio-tape recording just in case the digital version malfunctions. As you can recall from the invitation communication sent to you early, this study will not offer you any inducement or payment. Instead, you will be receiving a gift card at the end of the third interview as a way to thank you for your time and cooperation.

In order to be in compliance with regulations and other requirements of Northeastern University, The State of Connecticut, The College selected for this study, and the U.S. Government, all information collected will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the interview data and documents which will be kept safe in a locked cabinet. Your identity will be kept confidential by means of a pseudonym of your choosing. Your participation is totally voluntary, and if you decide to participate, please know that you can withdraw from the study at any time.

I, __________________________, acknowledge that I have received a full description of the study “Exploring Work-Study Students’ Experiences of Persistence at a Northeastern Community College” and I voluntarily agree to participate with the understanding that I can withdraw at any given time without having to provide a reason and that such withdrawal will incur no penalty. By signing this document, I understand that I am agreeing to take part of this study. I also understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form and my personal identification information will be kept confidential. In addition, I understand that the benefit of this study for me is that I will be able to tell my story and know that final results may be published in research articles and dissertations and/or presented at educational conferences, all with the good intention of helping others.

José E. Vélez Otero  
Name of the Researcher  
Signature  
Date

Telephone: Personal number here  
Email: Personal email here

Name of the participant  
Signature  
Date
APPENDIX E: Interview Protocol Form

Student Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Institution: ___Northeastern University, Doctor of Education Program___

Interviewer: __José E. Vélez Otero_______________________________

Interviewee’s Pseudonym: ______________________________________

Location: ___________________________________________________

Date of interview: ____________________________________________

Semi-Structured Interview - Transitions

Part I. Greet the participant, introduce the interview procedure, and ask the warm-up questions. Describe the study and answer any questions the interviewee may have. Describe the role of the researcher. Discuss the consent form with the participant; make sure s/he signs it; and provide a copy to each interviewee. Remember to manage the time properly, with no more than ten (10) minutes dedicated to this section.

Interviewer: Thank you for participating in this study. As we previously discussed during our invitation meeting, this study will explore Work-Study students’ experiences of persistence, or staying in college. You were selected from among other students because you have participated in the Work-Study Program at this college and you meet the research criteria. It is my hope that by the end of the study we will have gained a wealth of insights into student workers’ experiences of persistence that could lead to additional Work-Study funding here, greater participation in the program, and therefore an enhancement of Work-Study students’ academic experiences.

Because you have agreed to share yours with me, I consider your responses very important. In this regard, I would like to audio-record our conversation today. I will utilize both an electronic device and a regular audiotape recorder as a backup. As I mentioned to you during our first meeting, your confidentiality will be protected at all times. To help me do so, I will ask you to select a pseudonym (another name) of your choice for yourself. Once you have your pseudonym, that name will be the only identifier on the interview transcript. In addition, I will be the only person transcribing our conversation today. Once I have finalized the transcription, the audio recordings will be destroyed. Given all these conditions, will you grant me permission to record this interview? If the response is yes, thank the interviewee and remember to ask for permission one more time before starting the actual recorded interview.

Before we can proceed, I must comply with our university’s human-subjects requirements which state that I have to obtain a written, signed consent form which I am providing you now. There will be two exact copies—one for the university and one for your personal records. The importance of this form is that it will re-assure both you and the institution that your
confidentiality will be maintained; your participation is totally voluntary and you can withdraw at any time; and I guarantee that no harm will be caused to you or the university as a result of this interview. So, once again, do you have any questions about the interview process?

This interview is planned to last near one hour and 90 minutes at most. This length should provide enough time for you to answer all the questions that I would like to cover with you today. If time starts running out, I might interrupt you so that we can move on to the next question. I will also take written notes during the interview that will help me remember details about our conversation. Do you have any question at this time? Now I will start recording our conversation. Just to make sure, do I have your permission to record this interview? Start recording the interview once permission has been granted.

Part II - Interviewee’s Work-Study Background

The objectives of Part II are (1) to establish rapport with the participant, and (2) to understand how s/he makes sense of the Work-Study situation.

If the student is tentative or does not understand the question, paraphrase it and remember to use follow-up phrases like “Please tell me more.” and “Can you provide more details?”

1. Can you describe how and when you became involved in the work-study program?

2. Can you tell me what a normal day as a work-study student is like and how it impacts your studies?

3. If I were to ask you to describe what being a work-study student means to you, what would you say?

   Prompt: What are your thoughts? What was the first thing that came to your mind when you heard the question? Does any particular phrase occur to you?

Part III - Persistence Questions

The objective of this part is to explore and understand what the participants report as experiences influencing their persistence.

1. Can you describe your goals at college?

2. Can you talk about how you support yourself while you are in college?

3. What influence and/or motivation if any has the work-study program had on your college experience and your term-by-term decisions to re-enroll?

   Prompt: Have you benefited from participating in the work-study program in ways other than being paid for your time?

4. Can you briefly describe your daily interactions with co-workers and supervisors?
Prompt: Do you talk with your co-workers or supervisors? If so, can you describe generally what types of conversations take place? (e.g., are they work-related, personal, and academic?)

5. As a work-study student, can you describe any experience in that program which helped you engage in other collegial activities whether academic or co-curricular?

Prompt: How did this experience help you think about yourself as a student?

6. Can you describe if applicable a time when you felt like leaving college?

Prompt: What prevented you to leave?

Part IV - Resilience

The objective of this section is to explore the framework of resilience which is directly linked to persistence.

1. How have you adapted to college life and processes such as registration, applying for financial aid, and final exams; and how you deal with college-based stress from exams, work responsibilities, and/or campus activities? Follow up: How have you managed to accomplish all your required tasks?

2. Can you describe an experience when you were struggling in a class and had to ask for support? Follow-up: What did you do? To whom did you go for help?

3. Can you briefly describe any adverse situation or life challenge that you overcame while in college?

Prompt: How did you deal with it? What type of support did you receive (whether from someone on campus or in the community)? How do you feel now about that situation and how it was resolved?

4. Is there anything I didn’t ask you that you think might be helpful for my understanding the experiences that helped you stay in college?

This concludes our meeting today. Thank you for your participation.
APPENDIX F

Comparison between Hours Enrolled, Attended, and Worked

This part presents a comparison between each participant’s credit hours enrolled and hours attended per semester. The graphic also presents the amount of hours worked during the same period of time. According to the college’s Registrar, classes have a value of either three or four credits. Those with a value of three credits hours require a student to have a total of 37.5 class contact hours per semester. Those classes with a value of 4 credits require attendance of 50 hours per semester (A. Marrero, personal communication, June 30, 2014). Therefore, the attended hours were calculated based on this data: i.e., for an enrollment of 6 credits, the participant would have attended 75 hours.

Because each participant had worked a different number of semesters, some had more contact hours over all than others. It is important to note that the data selected are only from those semesters during which the participants worked. The important point is that they all persisted; that is, they kept continuous enrollment regardless of having had work-study commitments in prior semesters. All six participants of this study worked an average of 12 to 15 hours during the fall and spring sessions. In some instances, they worked between 15 and 20 hours during the summer I and summer II intersessions. Lastly, they all worked between 12 to 15 hours during the winter intersession.

For the purposes of this study, the hours worked from July 1st through December 31st of any given year were counted under the fall semester. Likewise, the hours worked from January 1st through June 30th during the same year were counted under the spring semester. However, because students started working during different semesters, this study will simply number the semesters (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.) instead of specifying fall or spring. The last column shows the total
amount of consecutive enrolled semesters per student while participating in the work-study program. Hence, this information corroborates their persistence.

Table 3

*Comparison between Hours Enrolled, Hours Attended, and Hours Worked*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Josh</th>
<th>Altagracia</th>
<th>Serenity</th>
<th>Cecilia</th>
<th>Roxy</th>
<th>Sophie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Semester Enrolled Hours &amp; Attended Hours</td>
<td>9 Credits</td>
<td>112.5 hrs.</td>
<td>162.5 hrs.</td>
<td>112.5 hrs.</td>
<td>150 hrs.</td>
<td>75 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Semester Worked Hours</td>
<td>189 hrs.</td>
<td>162.5 hrs.</td>
<td>205.2 hrs.</td>
<td>487.2 hrs.</td>
<td>493 hrs.</td>
<td>124.5 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Semester Enrolled Hours &amp; Attended Hours</td>
<td>6 Credits</td>
<td>75 hrs.</td>
<td>125 hrs.</td>
<td>112.5 hrs.</td>
<td>112.5 hrs.</td>
<td>150 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Semester Worked Hours</td>
<td>282 hrs.</td>
<td>260 hrs.</td>
<td>155.5 hrs.</td>
<td>181.6 hrs.</td>
<td>72.2 hrs.</td>
<td>325 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Semester Enrolled Hours &amp; Attended Hours</td>
<td>10 Credits</td>
<td>125 hrs.</td>
<td>6 Credits</td>
<td>75 hrs.</td>
<td>10 Credits</td>
<td>12 Credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Semester Worked Hours</td>
<td>145 hrs.</td>
<td>154.5 hrs.</td>
<td>340 hrs.</td>
<td>197.5 hrs.</td>
<td>475 hrs.</td>
<td>125 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Semester Enrolled Hours &amp; Attended Hours</td>
<td>6 Credits</td>
<td>75 hrs.</td>
<td>6 Credits</td>
<td>75 hrs.</td>
<td>7 Credits</td>
<td>15 Credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Semester Worked Hours</td>
<td>244 hrs.</td>
<td>268 hrs.</td>
<td>65 hrs.</td>
<td>175 hrs.</td>
<td>199 hrs.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Semester Enrolled Hours &amp; Attended Hours</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10 Credits</td>
<td>6 Credits</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Semester Worked Hours</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>175 hrs.</td>
<td>140 hrs.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>Enrolled Hours &amp; Attended Hours</td>
<td>Worked Hours</td>
<td>Total Number of Semesters - Persistence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>N/A N/A N/A 9 Credits 112.5 hrs.</td>
<td>N/A N/A</td>
<td>4 4 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>N/A N/A N/A 10 Credits 125 hrs.</td>
<td>N/A N/A</td>
<td>7 5 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A N/A N/A 339 hrs.</td>
<td>N/A N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A N/A N/A 261 hrs.</td>
<td>N/A N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data displayed in table 3 compares the hours enrolled, hours attended, and hours worked by each of the participants. All participants spent a significant amount of their time at their work location when compared to the hours they attended classes. Josh, Altagracia, Cecilia, and Roxy worked twice the amount of hours enrolled. Serenity and Sophie reported the lowest proportion in comparison to the other participants. However, the working hour’s proportion was higher than the attended hours. Serenity’s proportion was 1.75% more hours worked than attended while Sophie’s proportion was 1.70% more hours worked than attended. It is significant to mention that Serenity, Roxy and Sophie were the only participants enrolling full-time at any given time. Roxy was the only participant enrolling full-time in more than one semester with three of five semesters as a full time student.

The importance of this finding is that provides an understanding of how this group of students utilized the work-study location as the center where they spent the majority of their time on campus which helped them navigate through college. Consequently, the participants had additional time to receive supervisor and peer academic support, socialize, get involved in other
collegiate activities, and develop their personal and professional identities. Most importantly, this group of students had the convenience of working to then attend classes as it relates to their successfully attain their individual goals (persist).
APPENDIX G

IRB APPROVAL

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: June 18, 2014

IRB #: CPS14-05-02

Principal Investigator(s): Kimberly Nolan
José E. Vélez Otero

Department: Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University

Title of Project: Exploring Work-Study Student’s Experiences of Persistence at a Northeastern Community College

Participating Sites: [blank]

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7

Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form.

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: JUNE 17, 2015

Investigator’s Responsibilities:

1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630